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# Sacred Rhythms

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## An Ethnography of a Cardiff Mosque

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Theological Studies

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In the name of God, and with blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

I could never thank all those who have made this thesis possible.  
The names are too numerous, their contributions too great,  
to do justice in a few words.

In finding my words lacking, and my gratitude overwhelming,  
I rely on Him to do what I am unable to do.



## **DECLARATION**

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

Signed ..... (candidate)      Date .....

## **STATEMENT 1**

This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD.

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## **STATEMENT 2**

This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. The views expressed are my own.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents a case study of a single mosque, Jamia Masjid. It provides a description of everyday life, with attention to the congregation and the construction of sacred space. Its claim to originality is that it is an “insider” ethnographic perspective of a mosque in Britain, built upon an extended year-long period of fieldwork. It is an “insider” ethnography both in the sense that the researcher has a pre-existing relationship with the mosque, and also, that it focuses on the space and meanings within the mosque. Its timeliness is predicated upon the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century being a period in which an increasingly British-born and young Muslim population take leadership in mosques established a generation prior. The thesis argues that Jamia Masjid is an interspatial mosque, providing a diverse range of activities to fulfil the needs of its congregation. It achieves this by operating as a subaltern counter-public, or a “coffee shop mosque”, in which congregants take agency for activities and events. The role of the congregation is pronounced in the thesis to address an identified gap in existing research.

Furthermore, the thesis provides theorisation on the temporal dimensions of sacred space, drawing upon Henri Lefebvre and *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). It argues that sacredness is not a static concept, but dynamic and rhythmic. This sacredness is described as *baraka*. Jamia Masjid is both a site of distributing and receiving *baraka*, and its sacredness is constructed dialectically – transcending some existing categorisations of sacred space in the literature. The thesis argues also that conflict is not an inevitable consequence of sacred space but, at times, a meaningful way of marking and constructing it. These original theoretical contributions are presented through a rich ethnography that provides an insight into the everyday activities of a mosque congregation.

Words: 296

### **Notes on Translations, Transliterations, and Referencing**

1. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of the Quran are taken from Abdel Haleem (2005). Chapter and verse numbers are provided in text, and a full reference for Abdel Haleem's translation can be found in the bibliography.
2. *Hadith* citations refer to the collection and any relevant numbering. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are the author's own work.
3. The original date of publications is included in text if the date of the reprint is misleading, but is only included the first time. For example, a reference to *Primitive Culture* would first appear as (Tylor 1958 – originally 1871) and (Tylor 1958) thereafter.
4. Transliterations of non-English words used in the thesis are listed in the glossary. In general, the most conventional spelling has been utilised. Diacritical marks have not been used.

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## **Section One – Introductory Overview**

## **Chapter One – Introduction**

“This mosque means everything to me. It’s like home, and heaven, and everything mixed in together. I belong here, even if I don’t belong anywhere else. It’s like a piece of paradise, cut and pasted here in Cardiff” - Sulaiman, a congregant of Jamia Masjid.

The fieldnotes upon which this ethnographic thesis is based form several thick stacks of papers, organised into folders and covered in scribbles, as well as a jealously guarded harddrive of digital notes, password protected to ensure safety. The notes contain a record of a year I spent researching a single mosque, Jamia Masjid. It is substantially more than that however. It records the births of four children, celebrated through *aqiqahs*, the deaths of five elders, marked through the *janaza* prayer. It records hundreds of moments of worship, from the formal daily prayers to quiet moments of private supplication. Congregants of the mosque prayed for the health of their loved ones, the recovery of sick relatives, for better job prospects, and for help with the burdens of their lives. There were marriages too, eleven in total, in which couples pledged fidelity to each other and began new chapters in their lives. The fieldnotes contain within them the passionate efforts of volunteers, who sacrifice their time and devote their skills to organising exercise classes, extra-curricular tuition, employment workshops, and charity fundraisers. It records nearly £200,000 raised in charitable causes. The list could go on; of activities and endeavours and projects which all formed the daily life of the mosque. The purpose of this brief introductory paragraph is to stress that all that follows, the ethnographic descriptions and theoretical abstractions, are built upon the human experiences of the congregants who allowed me to include them in my research. The word ‘*sonder*’ has been proposed as a noun to describe the realisation that others you encounter lead lives as vivid, rich, and complex as your own. I came across the word to try and describe that realisation, which came over me time and time again during my fieldwork. It is perhaps a familiar experience for many researchers. In this thesis, the contents of which I outline below, I hope the reader departs with a sense of *sonder* about the congregants who allowed me into their lives and enabled me to transform them into fieldnotes and then subsequently, this written work.

This thesis is an ethnography of a Cardiff mosque. I intend to provide a description which looks at the everyday of the mosque and the construction of sacred space. I also intend to provide the reader with an insight into the interpretative significance of everyday mosque life, in other words, a thick description (Geertz 1973). Structurally, the following work is divided into four sections and eleven chapters. The first section is an introductory overview, the opening chapter of which is this very introduction, which serves to orientate the reader. The second chapter is titled *Setting the Scene*. It is a literature review that explores academic research on mosques, making the case for the

unique contribution offered through an ethnographic study of a single mosque. Subsequently, it looks at theories of sacred space, highlighting the temporal dimension of sacredness as an issue I will explore and contribute to.

The second section is the methodology. It begins with Chapter Three, which provides an overview of ethnography and the study of religion. The key aim of this chapter is to provide an argument for the particularities of my ethnography by indicating the traditions upon which I draw. Chapter Four offers a prosaic description of my fieldwork practice, the data collection methods, and my strategy of analysis. Chapter Five looks at my reflexivity as a researcher. I use a metaphor of the “ethnographic journey” to illustrate my decisions, agency (and at times, lack thereof) and positionality in the research process.

The heart of my thesis is reached in Section Three, comprising four chapters that collectively contain my “ethnography” and present my findings from a year of fieldwork. These chapters contain my original empirical contributions. Chapter Six, entitled *God’s House*, serves to introduce the mosque, to contextualise it, and to consider the mosque and its character. I argue here that the mosque is interspatial in its purpose, ecumenical in its approach, and reflects a semi-public sphere of engagement and activism for its congregants. Chapter Seven, titled *A Day in the Mosque*, describes a single twenty-four-hour period, looking empirically at the diverse activities and peoples to which the mosque is home, but also beyond them at the structuring and guiding influence of rhythms and how they intersect in a single day. This chapter introduces some of the key arguments I make about the construction of sacred space and its temporal dimensions. Chapter Eight, *Baraka in the Mosque*, looks more closely at what sacredness means to the congregants, the spatial practices with which it is tied and the significance of sacredness in the mosque. I describe the dialectic relationship between ritual which blesses space, and *adab* (etiquette) that marks space which is blessed, and so look at how *baraka* is constructed. Sacredness can also be disturbed and contested, and Chapter Nine – *Breaking Baraka* looks at the underlying role these conflicts play. Rather than being an inevitable consequence of sacredness, as many previous scholars have argued, I contend that tension and conflict around sacred space and time can underline its very sacredness. Cumulatively, these chapters summarise my original and unique contribution. I advance the consideration of the temporal dimensions of sacred space by considering the temporality of rituals, and the rhythmicity of religious practice. I develop existing theories on the construction of sacred space, and argue for a dialectic or processual conceptualisation of the sacred. Finally, I provide a case study for how contestation within and about sacred space can be an important part of its construction. These theoretical advancements however sit alongside my empirical contribution, which is an ethnography of a mosque in Britain, perhaps the first, but certainly one of the few.

The significance of my ethnography itself as a contribution cannot be understated, and indeed there is a tension throughout the thesis between providing a rich ethnography alongside analysis. I have sought to address this tension by keeping analytic commentary to a minimum in Section Three, saving it for an extended chapter in Section Four. It is in this chapter I present a synthesised discussion of my findings, locating them in a wider academic context and outlining the value and originality of my contributions. Chapter Ten is more than a mere summary, I advance the ideas and theories which I introduced in the ethnography chapter. It is the most important theoretical chapter and contains my key arguments. The thesis ends with a summarising conclusion and where I envisage future research should head. Academic contributions notwithstanding, it is hoped that upon completion of this thesis that the reader leaves with an insight into the lives of the congregation of the mosque, who shared in and supported the coming together of this piece of work.

## **Chapter Two – Setting the Scene:**

### **A Literature Review of British Mosques and Sacred Space**

The following literature review is a review of two parts. The first presents research on British mosques, the second, research on sacred space. In both sections, I present the key thinkers and academics who have shaped the study of the topics at hand, as well as making clear to the reader where I intend to advance my own ideas. My key empirical contribution is to the study of mosques and within the field of British Muslim studies. The bulk of my theoretical contribution is to the interdisciplinary study of sacred space. This distinction is not absolute, but will help the reader orientate themselves as I introduce and move through a range of scholars and published works that span over a century. With regards to the study of British mosques, I demonstrate in the coming chapter how research has largely focused on mosques from the outside looking in, that is to say, mosques as they are located in a conceptual space (such as the city, the nation, and so on). I intend to complement this literature by advancing an “insider” ethnographic perspective, one which is particularly concerned with the everyday. In terms of the study of sacred space, I contend there is a paucity of studies that look at Muslim sacred space via the mosque, with scholars instead showing greater interest in non-traditional sacred spaces, highlighting the value of considering the construction and maintenance of sacredness in a mosque. I also argue that theories of sacred space have largely been inattentive to issues of temporality, something I address by offering a consideration of the spatial and temporal implications of sacredness within my ethnography.

#### ***Part One: British Mosques***

##### **Introduction**

In February 2016, the Muslim Council of Britain organised a national open day titled “Visit My Mosque”. It was the second year the project had run, and included 90 mosques from England, Wales, and Scotland (Muslim Council of Britain 2016). The open days received significant coverage in both national and regional news outlets. The Guardian wrote that it was intended to “counter negative perceptions of Islam” (Sherwood 2016), WalesOnline reported it with the headline that it was held to “break down barriers” (Wightwick 2016), and the Daily Mail said the open days were to “show unity” (Mail Online 2016). The events took place on the same weekend as the inaugural protest of PEGIDA UK. The organisation, founded in Germany in 2014, translates its acronym as *Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West*. Though PEGIDA’s UK march attracted only a few hundred protestors, inconsequential compared to the tens of thousands the organisation attracted in Germany, news articles from the weekend included both the march and the mosque open day. The polarised headlines provide an insight into some of the key issues raised in the



literature review that follows. On the one hand, British Muslims are increasingly organising, mobilising their resources, and working co-operatively to establish platforms for civic engagement - something examined by scholars such as Jones et al. (2014), and Bolognani and Statham (2013). On the other hand, debates around Muslim presence in Europe and Britain, and the “islamisation of space” still form a significant discourse within media and political circles, as well as academic inquiry (see Moore et al 2008 for media narratives; Allievi 2009 for a European overview). Yet, away from the headlines and controversy there is a more everyday presence of mosques in the city. Standing outside the mosque on one occasion I overheard a builder speaking on his mobile phone, “it’s not the pub we went to last week, it’s the other one, opposite the mosque”. Here the mosque was not a site of controversy, or of interfaith meetings or bridge-building, but simply a casual part of the urban landscape in the same category as pubs, shops, or car parks. All three of these themes are present in the literature review that follows; the mosque as a representation and product of British Muslim agency, the mosque as a site of conflict and controversy, and the “everyday”. The latter, the everyday role of the mosque, is often relegated in academic studies to a peripheral role, and it is this everyday aspect to which my thesis attends as its primary concern. It forms the basis of my thesis’ claim to originality and value. Everyday has a double meaning of course. In one sense, it is the commonplace, prosaic, and ordinary. In another, it is the routine and reoccurring. My thesis considers the everyday from both perspectives, and it does so through the method of ethnography.

As an ethnography, my thesis is an important and original contribution to existing literature on British mosques. At points during the conception of my study, my PhD was described both by myself and others as “the first ethnography of a British mosque”, a claim that I only put forward tentatively, since such superlative claims invite contradiction. It is however true that there are no records of studies of British mosques that describe themselves as ethnographies (a forgotten thesis in a library somewhere notwithstanding). In addition, as one of my supervisors, Dr Tom Hall, observed, the literature tends to look at *mosques in space*, as opposed to my own focus, which is *space in mosques*. To phrase it with a slightly different emphasis, I intend to demonstrate to the reader that studies thus far have been concerned with the meaning *of* mosques. There is a negative space however, an opaque area, about what takes place *within* mosques. I intend to illuminate this by examining the meanings *in* mosques.

In addition, my thesis is a timely study. Demographics, politics, and socio-economics have colluded to indicate the current decade will be a pivotal one for mosques in Britain. As McLoughlin contends, contemporary mosques in the UK are “re-inventing the Islamic tradition by slowly taking on a range of community functions that would be more or less unheard of in Pakistan today” (2005, 1048). The Muslim Council of Britain’s mosque open day is but one of numerous examples of

mosques moving beyond what their founders may have conceived to be their purpose. What is stimulating this shift in the practice and functions of mosques? The answer, I believe, is due to the remarkably young characteristic of British Muslims who are now “coming of age”. 33% of British Muslims are under the age of fifteen and the median age is twenty-five, compared to forty for the wider population (Muslim Council of Britain, 2015: 27). This youthfulness is a result of the patterns of migration. The first British Muslims were migrants. By contrast, the 2011 census indicated 47.2% of Muslims were born in the United Kingdom. As these younger, British-born Muslims, become significant actors in mosque leadership in Britain, one can expect changes in British mosques also. The subject of this ethnography, Jamia Masjid, in many ways typifies a mosque with an active youth congregation. Thus, an ethnographic study of this single mosque will document the shifting sands of mosque usage and evolution.

The following review is ordered roughly chronologically, looking first at historic mosques before considering more recent developments. This ordering is intended to give the reader a familiarity with the context of British mosques today, which will also serve to stress the timeliness of my contribution. The structure also covers the various ways mosques are conceived (*meanings of mosques*) as well how the mosque is situated in a wider landscape (*mosques in space*) before citing a small handful of academic works which begin to address the question of *meanings in mosques* and the *space in mosques*, the areas to which I intend to contribute.

### **Historic Mosques**

Estimates of the number of British mosques vary. Some place the figure as anywhere between 850-1500 (Gilliat-Ray and Birt 2010), whereas Naqshbandi estimates 1695 (2015). Hidden behind these statistics, and partly the reason for their variation, is the diversity of mosques themselves. Some of these mosques may be humble and small converted terraced houses, others will be purpose built landmarks such as London Central Mosque. While Christianity has chapels, churches, and cathedrals – Anglophone Islam has yet to develop such a vocabulary. The very earliest British mosques were equally as diverse as those that would follow. There is an academic interest in early mosques which can be observed by the dedicated accounts of their origins that have been published, for example Ansari’s *The Making of the East London Mosque* (2011), Salamat’s *A Miracle at Woking* (2008) and Geaves’ *Islam in Victorian Britain* (2010) which looks at the Liverpool Institute (see also Ansari 2002; Gilliat-Ray and Mellor 2010; Gilliat-Ray 2010a; Petersen 2008). More general publications tracing the settlement of Muslims in Britain also reflect this growing historical interest amongst scholars of British Islam (Halliday 2010; Seddon 2014), an interest succinctly summarised by Gilliat-Ray: -

“The active documentation of past historical events and achievements seems to be part of a concerted effort to enable British Muslims to feel embedded in and connected to UK society, while also constructively challenging assumptions about the supposed segregation and disconnection of British Muslims from wider society.” (2010a, 189)

The historic mosque takes on a meaning of belonging, shown through a timeline of British Islam on the website *Islam in British Stone* (Islam in British Stone, 2016) which identifies the founding of key mosques as significant to the development of Islam in Britain. What historic works tell us about mosques is plentiful. They tend to be founded by charismatic and convinced leaders, such as Abdullah Quilliam in Liverpool (Geaves 2010) or Abdullah al-Hakimi in Cardiff (Gilliat-Ray and Mellor 2010), who played important roles as intermediaries between government and early Muslim populations (Evans 1985; Halliday 2010). The mosques themselves were often utilised as symbols of the religious freedom of Britain, especially during the colonial era (Ansari 2011, 11; Petersen 2008; Salamat 2008). Perhaps unsurprising for historic works, the life within the mosque – everyday or otherwise – remains largely untouched. These scholarly efforts however help us to locate the institution of the mosque in modern British history, and underline the contention that mosques are important to Muslim communities, founded as they are from the earliest days of Muslim settlement in the United Kingdom.

### **The Mosque Building Era**

The bulk of Britain’s mosques were established following migration from the Indian subcontinent after World War 2. This period of migration and settlement is documented by researchers such as Adams (1987), Anwar (1979; 1985; 1993) and Rex (1991; 1994). The increase in the Muslim population of Britain led to a substantial growth in the number of mosques. McLoughlin, writing in 2005, observes: -

“In 1963 there were just 13 mosques listed with the Registrar General... estimates suggest that there may now be 1,000 including those that are unregistered... This mushrooming of numbers since the late 1970s and 1980s indicates that the reuniting of Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi families across continents was decisive in catalysing the reconstruction of Islam in diaspora.” (McLoughlin 2005, 1045)

What prompted these migrants to begin establishing mosques? Settlement seems to be a compelling factor. There is a recurring theme in the literature that once the itinerant Muslim migrants settled in Britain long-term, they sought to address their religious needs by establishing

mosques. The link between the legal status of migrants and building mosques is indicated by Gale (2008, 23) who describes how the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 had the unexpected result of encouraging migrants to establish families in Britain, which in turn led to mosque-building efforts. Geddes makes the same point, observing the irony that laws designed to limit settlement “actually stimulated ‘beat the ban’ migration from people who feared that they might be affected by the restrictions and separated from their family members as a result” (2003, 35). The link between migration law and the establishment of mosques was also observed by Jonker (2005, 1069) in his study of mosque conflicts in Germany, as well as Manco and Kanmaz (2005, 1107) in their study of mosque conflicts in Belgium. The mosque is a symbol of settlement. The more invested Muslim migrant communities are in their new homes in diaspora, the greater the likelihood they invest resources and capital into building institutions that meet their religious and cultural needs. The fulfilment of needs is a strikingly uniform motivating factor for the establishment of mosques in diaspora, and an issue that will be returned to in my findings (particularly Chapter Six). This period is aptly described by Birt as a “mosque-building-phase” (2006, 687). While the mosque is presented in the literature as a milestone in the settlement of Muslims migrants, clearly not all Muslims are migrants. The number of Muslims in Britain increased from 3.07% of the population in 2001 to 4.83% in 2011 (1.6 million Muslims to 2.7 million) according to the census. This growth, coupled with the revelation in the 2011 census that 47.2% of Muslims were born in the United Kingdom (Muslim Council of Britain 2015, 22) indicates that this increase in Muslim is likely to be fuelled by new births more than migration. This shift in demographics will undoubtedly influence mosques, their purpose, and functions. How are younger British-born Muslims impacting on the contemporary mosque? This thesis is a partial answer to that question.

For in-depth explorations of the process involved in building a mosque during the mosque-building era, very few works exist. This is perhaps because academics at the time were more interested in settlement and the implications of migration on wider society than the religious institutions they were building, the significance of which was more pronounced in hindsight. Acknowledgement must also be made of the small number of researchers who were involved in the study of British Islam, which naturally restricted the number of issues that could be explored. There are exceptions however, such as Naylor and Ryan’s work (2002), which considers the politics of mosque establishment historically (in the 1920s) in comparison to a case in the 1990s. Gale (2005) also provides an account of the issues around planning permission in establishing a mosque in Birmingham, and DeHanas and Pieri (2011) explore a proposed “mega-mosque” in East London.

Two scholars whose work is of interest are Pnina Werbner and Stephen Barton. Werbner’s ethnographic and detailed accounts of Muslim women, Sufism, and religious practice in Manchester

amongst Pakistanis are insightful and have proven themselves valuable scholarly contributions. They are published as a “trilogy” (Werbner 1990; 2002; 2003) and paint a vivid picture of a Muslim community. In *The Migration Process*, Werbner (1990) turns her attention towards the issue of class distinction amongst British Pakistanis in Manchester. She draws on a Bourdieusian theories to explain how gift exchanges, cultural celebrations, and building religious institutions, operate to create cultural capital. She identifies the mosque as “the central forum in which the elite competes to legitimise its status” and how “intense rivalry characterised contributions for the mosque project, increasing the level of sums donated by elite members” (1990, 310-311). Thus, we are provided an indication of how mosque building can establish status and primacy amongst nascent migrant communities. She contends that the mosque forms “the highest locus of value and communal involvement” (1990, 310), and so is capable of distributing social capital.

Stephen Barton’s distinctively different approach from Werbner offers an important and valuable account of a mosque during an embryonic phase of Muslim settlement. He adopts the position of a self-reflexive scholar, considering his role as an outsider, a male, and a non-Muslim (Barton 1986, 7-9), and stating openly the ways in which his identity as a “priest” created tensions within the research process (Barton 1986, 18-20). Barton’s work is highly, and almost exclusively, descriptive. Space is also given in Barton’s thesis to the role and function of the Imam. The Imam operates as a functionary of the mosque and the wider community, he leads prayer, officiates rituals, and is sometimes brought outside “for the celebration of rites of passage within particular households” so as “to bring blessing, *baraka*” (1986, 115). Barton draws out the contradiction of the role of the imam in that he is both leader and servant (1986, 189) – “the imam who is respected in public may be ridiculed in private” (1986, 190). He observes that the Imam “has virtually no part to play in relation with the wider, multi-cultural society of Bradford. It is not the Imam who represents the Bengalis to others, but the President of the Twaqulia Islamic Society” (1986, 191). Barton’s argument about the role of the Imam serves as an interesting counter-point to the literature presented shortly which considers how imams are often expected to undertake responsibilities of civic engagement. Noteworthy too is the term *baraka*. The mosque, ritual, and the imam are shown to be a source of *baraka*. This will become a major theme of my thesis. Barton’s work serves to illustrate the changing functions of the mosque. I position my own thesis as being a continuation in the same spirit of Barton’s work, in particular its ethnographic and reflexive approach and its consideration of the space within mosques.

### **The Role of the Mosque**

In the last decade, research has looked at the function and purpose of mosques in British society. Much of this research has been done via exploration of the role of the Imam. For example, Gilliat-

Ray (2006) discusses the training of imams in *dar ul-ulooms*, and imams who have moved into realms such as chaplaincy (Gilliat-Ray Pattison and Ali 2013). Lewis (2006a; 2006b) likewise presents case studies of how graduates of Deobandi *dar ul-ulooms* have adopted innovative approaches to exercising their role as *ulama* outside the scope of a mosque. Geaves' (2008, 108) provides a valuable survey of mosques as well as a consideration of how the role of the imam varies between Deobandi and Barelwi *alims*. The impact of theological views is also given attention by Eade and Garbin (2006) who describe the religious struggles between Muslim denominations amongst Bangladeshis in East London. Birt considers how the imam is expected to "act as an agent of national integration" (2006, 702) by government policies, an issue also discussed at length by Jones (2013). Many of these studies are united by their identification of the imam as an important factor in the development of Islam in Britain, whether within or outside of the mosque. They help build a picture of the various types of religious leadership roles within Islam, and help nuance simplistic reductions of the imam as equivalent to Anglican or Christian clergy. As Jones (2013) and Birt (2006) identify, the imam and the mosque are also often brought into debates about extremism and counter-radicalisation. Brown also considers the government's aims to promote women's participation on the basis that "first, women will de-radicalise the mosque's messages and, second, their inclusion indicates the integration of Muslim communities into the 'British way of life'" (2008, 481). Brown's study, along with think-tank reports such as that by the Quilliam Foundation (Dyke 2009) highlight how mosques have become contentious battlegrounds for successive governments in deploying counter-extremism strategies. Mosques are not only sites of government policy, but are also used by Muslims as platforms for engagement with a wider civic community, thus Bolognani and Statham (2013) explore the activism of mosques in Bradford and Dobbernack et al. (2014) present their research on mosques playing a role in encouraging political participation in the 2010 General Election.

This survey of literature on the roles of mosques gives an insight into why mosques are increasingly being described as a "community centre" (McLoughlin 2005). The mosque becoming a "community centre" or "multipurpose" is a claim that though made often is seldom explored in any depth. The multiplicity of ways in which mosques emerge and find their role in contemporary Britain is an area which is only beginning to be explored, and furthermore, how mosques manage these emerging and sometimes contradictory roles has rarely been considered at all. While the *function* of the mosque is discussed by the aforementioned studies, the *functioning* of the mosque is not considered, which is to say, who manages the mosque? Who holds power? How is it contested? If the mosque is increasingly becoming a community centre, how does it achieve this? The question

of who the actors are within the mosque beyond the imam and the committee remains largely untouched.

At times, the literature has been content to reduce the mosque to almost exclusively the imam and the committee. Lewis speaks of the way in which some imams seek “freedom from control by conservative mosque committee elders” (2006, 175) while Jones et al. state that in the UK, “the majority of mosques are run by local lay committees, with the imam sometimes being a minor functionary” (2014, 216). Geaves also focuses on these two agents when he reflects on the conditions which lead to mosques recruiting imams from abroad and concludes that it “may reflect the desire of young imams to seek employment in Britain but also their amenability to the control of the powerful mosque committees” (2008, 103), and Shannahan discusses how “UK Mosque management committees privilege male involvement” (2013, 1). While all examples cited are no doubt accurate, the absence of other mosque actors in the literature is notable, especially the congregation. If the committee is as powerful as the literature suggests, how does it achieve and manage this power? Are there any ways in which their power is resisted or challenged? Werbner (1990, 310-311) sheds some light on how a mosque committee might cement their influence over the congregation through her example of competitive charity, but the tendency to simplify the British mosque to imams and a committee is still prominent. Much like the space inside mosques, and the meanings within the mosque, the role of the congregation is a blind spot in the literature that risks skewing our understanding of British mosques. I thus identify the congregation as a central concern in my study, and even go as far to argue in Chapter Ten that there is a need for the development of congregational studies of Muslims.

### **Contest, Conflict and Controversy**

The contention that studies on mosques have focused on mosques in space, rather than the space in mosques, is best represented by a substantial body of research on the mosque as a site of conflict, contest and controversy. A good deal of this literature is produced by scholars working in the field of social geography, with some papers dating as far back 1981 (Hodgins). Gale looks at the ways that mosques fit into a wider urban context and the importance of political influences around planning permission (Gale and Naylor 2002; Peach and Gale 2003; Gale 2004; 2005; 2008). A special edition on mosque controversies in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* highlighted many examples of conflicts in, around, and about Muslim religious space (or lack of it) and the wider implications of such conflicts. The authors looked at mosques in Brussels (Manco and Kanmaz 2005), Berlin (Jonker 2005), Dutch towns (Landman and Wessels 2005), Bradford (McLoughlin 2005) and France (Cesari 2005), indicating how mosque conflicts are a feature across Europe (see also Allievi 2009) and America (Ruez 2012). The absence of mosque conflicts in rural Wales is explored by Dafydd Jones

who argues that the invisibility of mosques cements “narratives of absence” (2010) of Islam in rural areas. An alternative approach is provided in McLoughlin’s (2005) case study of how Bradford has largely avoided controversies over mosques. Both consider why the conflicts so prominent elsewhere did not appear in their chosen sites of research, which gives some indication of how ubiquitous mosque conflicts have, or are seen to have, become. These conflicts are inherently conflicts about the meanings of a mosque – namely what the mosque symbolises. Cesari’s illuminating summary is provided below: -

“The arguments put forward on the local level to justify refusal [of mosques] are the same throughout Europe: noise and traffic nuisance, incompatibility with existing urban planning, non-conformity with existing security norms. But beyond these technical obstacles, the resistance to new mosques is always linked to a meta-narrative about Islam. This narrative, prevalent on the international level, also exists on the national level, and in many European countries; Islam is systematically conflated with threats to international or domestic order.” (2005, 1019)

Thus, on one level, mosque conflicts are about the pragmatic and everyday issue of space, parking, and daily interaction, but there is also a degree to which the mosque symbolises wider anxieties about the role of Muslims and Islam in the contemporary West. The attention to conflict, contest and controversy reveals important instances of racism, discrimination, power, and its use in society. It provides numerous examples of how international conflicts and historical legacies can have tangible implications in the local and specific context, whether rural Wales, urban Birmingham, or cosmopolitan London. Cesari’s overview also provides some justification for adopting the ethnographic approach in the study of mosques. She cites the everyday and mundane concerns of traffic and parking, noise and nuisance – issues that are well suited for the ethnographic method to explore. There is an overlap here with studies of conflict in sacred space, which will be looked at more closely in the subsequent part of this chapter.

### **Summary**

Literature on historic mosques tells us about the power of the mosque as a symbol of belonging and establishment, a theme continued by scholars who documented Muslim settlement during the mosque-building era. More contemporary research has discussed the various roles of the mosque in society, and the training and work of the imam. This is complemented by extensive research into the controversies that surround the establishment of mosques. The literature overwhelmingly describes the mosque in a nexus of globalised relations – whether chain migration from South Asia, or



theological movements such as the Deobandi *dar ul-uloom*. Likewise, the meanings of a mosque, whether to non-Muslim neighbours, to security focused government officials, or to Muslims themselves, are traced in the literature. The researcher writing on mosques has largely stood on the outside, looking in, both physically and metaphorically. My thesis reverses this perspective. I intend to write from the inside, looking out, providing a perspective on the meanings within a mosque, exploring how the globalised nexus of relations in which the mosque sits are felt and contested by those who “make” the mosque. The relative scarcity of studies that look within the mosque creates a negative space around which the existing studies of mosques are situated. The everyday functioning of a mosque, the routine activities, and the role of the congregants in the mosque, are all issues that remain to be explored in any depth by the literature. These are issues which an ethnographic approach is well placed to illuminate. This negative space is not just one found here in the United Kingdom, but in Europe and North America also, and a handful of scholars have begun to address the issue in their local contexts. Prickett (2014) presents an ethnographic account of solidarity between African-American Muslim women in a mosque. Sani (2015) provides an ethnographic description of the *Jummah* prayer conducted in a campus chapel. In Europe, Kuppinger (2014) writes an account of how a single mosque congregation approach the question of “German Islam”. These journal articles are ethnographic, conscious of space, and seek to foreground the experiences of congregations. I mention them as they reflect my own approach to the study of a mosque, and serve to underline the timeliness of ethnographic approaches in the study of British mosques.

### ***Part Two: The Sacred***

Having presented an overview of research on mosques, I will turn my attention to the issue of sacred space, which forms a key theme of analysis and the primary theoretical contribution of my thesis.

#### **Introduction**

Modern understandings of the sacred are dominated by two historical scholars, Emile Durkheim (died 1917) and Mircea Eliade (died 1907). The following section, which traces theories and studies of the sacred, is also an account of the way in which their theories have been utilised, developed and contested by subsequent scholarship. The sacred is both an anthropological category (a debated one), as well as an area of research pursued by religious studies scholars, geographers and sociologists. It is an interdisciplinary topic of inquiry. In this context, to demonstrate the innovativeness of my own thought and to allow the reader to follow my arguments, I will present a survey of writers on sacred space organised into questions of *what*, *how*, *where*, and *when*. I will introduce general theories before focusing on Muslim sacred space. As will be made evident, there is a paucity of research on the question of *when*. It is this, the temporal dimension of the sacred, which

I develop further in my own findings, demonstrating how the activities that mark out sacred space can be equally focused on marking out time.

### **The *What***

The earliest scholars of comparative religion were particularly concerned with defining the essence of religion, and “the sacred” was often used in offering such a definition. Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915 - originally 1912) stresses the dominance of the profane and the sacred in ordering human activity (Durkheim 1915, 37). The profane is everyday. The sacred, however are those “things set apart and forbidden” (Durkheim 1915, 47). Sacred space, by extension, is space *set apart*, with rules dictating its use. A different definition of the sacred is proposed by Eliade, one of the earliest advocates of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion. In *The Sacred and the Profane* (Eliade and Trask 1959) and *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Eliade 1958) he puts forward his case, contending “every kratophany and hierophany whatsoever transforms the place where it occurs, hitherto profane, it is thenceforward a sacred area” (1958, 367). Kratophany (as the manifestation of a power) and hierophany (as a divine revelation) are terms employed by Eliade to describe the ways in which religious powers intrude into the world. Between Durkheim’s sacred as “things set apart” and Eliade’s hierophonic transformation, we can see two divergent approaches to defining and describing *what* the sacred is. Durkheim identifies the sacred as a product of human endeavour, whereas Eliade argues it is a divine intervention that forms the sacred. Chidester and Linenthal name these two approaches as the situational and the substantive (1995). The situational is characterised by Durkheim’s theories, and the theories of many subsequent scholars of sacred space, including Smith (1987), Knott (2005), Kong (2001) and Chidester and Linenthal themselves (1995). The substantive approaches, by contrast, are “attempts to replicate an insider’s evocation of certain experiential qualities that can be associated with the sacred”, thus “the sacred has been identified as an uncanny, awesome, or powerful manifestation of reality, full of ultimate significance” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, 5). Alongside Eliade, Rudolph Otto also characterises this approach (Otto and Harvey 1958). Few contemporary scholars position themselves theoretically in the substantive camp, though they may draw on Eliade and Otto’s vocabulary to describe the sacred and sacred spaces. For example, Chidester and Linenthal contend that sacred space is “significant space” (1995, 12), echoing Eliade’s description (Eliade and Trask 1959, 21).

This significance means that “sacred space is inevitably contested space” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, 15), which brings us to another dimension of *what* sacred space is. Chidester and Linenthal argue “when space or place becomes sacred, spatially scarce resources are transformed into a surplus of signification” (1995, 18). This exact point is argued by Desplat who posits “sacred places are contested sites because opinions of their uses may differ, just as the meanings of

‘sacredness’ may be questioned” (2012,10). Eade and Sallnow consider the issue of sacred space, conflict, and diversity of meanings, writing that: -

“[t]he power of a shrine, therefore, derives in large part from its character almost as a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices – though of course the shrine staff might attempt, with varying degrees of success, to impose a single, official discourse” (1991, 10).

The ability to accommodate diverse meanings can be interpreted to suggest a social and ritual coherence amidst the conflict, and it is this coherence-in-conflict that I contend is an important part of the construction of sacred space in Chapters Nine and Ten.

Speaking of sacred space as significant can, however, imply that profane space is insignificant. Shiner objects to this contention, stating that between the profane insignificant space and the sacred significant space exists “lived space” or “human space” (1972). This advancing of the early categories proposed by Eliade and Durkheim of the sacred and the profane is a reoccurring theme in the literature, and shifts our understandings of *what* sacred space is. Thus Ivakhiv, a social geographer, argues that sacredness should be understood as being “ways of distributing significance across geographic spaces” and “involving the distinction of different kinds of significance from among those being distributed”, such as “ideological”, “cosmological”, “political” and so on (2006, 171). Sacred space is thus broad term for Ivakhiv, indicating a range of different spatial meanings. Jackson and Henrie continue in the same vein. They propose categories including “mystico-religious”, “homelands” and “historical sacred sites” (1983). A similar effort is offered by sociologist of religion, Evans, who stresses the difference between the public and private roles of the sacred in a table that is reproduced below: -

Figure 1

A Typology of the Sacred			
		Sacred Source	
		Natural	Supernatural
Sacred Holder	Individual	Personal	Spiritual
	Group	Civil	Religious

(Evans 2003,40)

Evans sub-categorisation is a further nuancing of the categories of sacred, but also a response to ongoing debates about the definition and conceptualisation of religion (see Woodhead 2011 for an

overview of these debates). These categories reflect the kaleidoscopic manifestations of the sacred, not least because what is sacred is as diverse within a single religion as between them. Evans', Shiner's and others' sacred nuances are valuable as they allow a greater accuracy in describing sacred space, but exist in an awkward liminality. On the one hand, they are certainly more than empirical descriptions of sacred space tied to a singular context. On the other hand, they are only partial abstractions, and their applicability to other contexts is limited. This is not so much a criticism, but simply stresses that they are still operating within the pre-existing paradigms of sacred and profane as conceptualised by Durkheim and Eliade. Rather than being *new* theorisations, they are advances on existing theories.

A slightly different approach to the *what* of sacred space is proposed by Eade and Sallnow who "suggest that the triad of 'person', 'place', and 'text' might provide the co-ordinates" for the construction of sacred space in Christianity, and perhaps for "other scripturally based religious traditions as well" (1991, 9). They observe that within Christian traditions, the source of sacredness can be a result of a combination and interplay of sacred people, sacred places and sacred text. Their sacred triad identifies that sacredness cannot exist in the singular, but like Ivakhiv (2006) argues, is about different types of significance distributed in different ways. Their contention about the significance of the sacred text in other religions provides a segue into questions of Muslim sacred space, which do orbit around the issue of sacred words.

The *what* of Muslim sacred space is equally debated, but perhaps as a consequence of a more delineated object of study, there are a more coherent set of responses to the question of what is Muslim sacred space. Metcalf posits in the introduction to her edited collection that "a central theme that emerges in the essays is the individual and corporate recitation, display and transmission of sacred words as a focus of Muslim worship and moral behaviour" (1996, 4). She adds "Clifford Geertz has elaborated on this point by noting that Islamic buildings are primarily spaces where the faithful engage with sacred words, whether in prayer (the mosque), education (the *madrassa*), or meditation (the *khanaqah*)" (1996, 5<sup>1</sup>). Contemporary scholars have largely avoided Durkheim and Eliade's attempts at defining a core or essence of the sacred, as few definitions can stretch to cover the diversity and multiplicity of religious expressions which exist. In the context of the Muslim tradition, however, it seems appropriate to describe the core of Muslim sacredness as the Quran, the sacred words to which Metcalf and Geertz refer. The types of spaces that these sacred words create however can vary. Gottschalk argues for a distinction he sees emerging from the chapters of his own collection: -

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<sup>1</sup> Metcalf explains these comments were made by Geertz in person, see Metcalf (1996, 23) for full details.

“Perhaps one way to nuance the notion of sacred among the sites described in this volume is by differentiating between “energized” and “nonenergized” places. As opposed to the sacrality associated with the latter because they serve as sites of devotion to a superhuman agent, we can perhaps describe a place as energized when devotees recognize it as emitting a self-actualised power, either because of the location itself or some object present there. Muslims often speak of *baraka*, a divine blessing commonly associated with the tombs of Sufis and figures such as Khidr/Khadr.” (Gottschalk 2013, 6)

Gottschalk’s division of “energized” places as sites which emit *baraka* and of “nonenergized” places which are sites of devotion has some parallels to the substantive and situational division of Chidester and Linenthal (1995). What is Muslim sacred space? Muslim sacred spaces are invariably spaces of *baraka*, whether received or distributed, and always associated with the words of the Quran. *Baraka*, or blessings, receives extended description and attention in the ethnography chapters of thesis, central as it is to the construction and maintenance of Muslim sacred space.

### **The How**

The question of *how* sacred space comes about is tied closely to the issue of *what* sacred space is. The substantive and situational divide introduced by Chidester and Linenthal (1995) discussed earlier is once again relevant. Durkheim and the situational scholars consider sacred space constructed via ritual and practice, whereas Eliade discusses sacred space as a consequence of hierophony. Eliade goes even further to say “in actual fact, the place is never ‘chosen’ by man; it is merely discovered by him” (1958, 369). These phrases are helpful for us - is sacred space *chosen* or *discovered*? Once again, Eliade stands quite solitary in his phenomenological description of sacred space as discovered. Chidester and Linenthal are dismissive of his position, arguing that the “human agency, including all the ritual, interpretive, social, economic and political labor that goes into consecrating space, is erased by attributing all the action to ‘holy places’ and ‘gods and spirits’” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, 16-17). The view that sacred space is chosen, that is to say, socially constructed, is prominent among the scholars of religion, geographers and sociologists who study the topic. Knott states unambiguously that “sacred space is not the stimulus for ritual; ritual, as sacred making behaviour, brings about ‘sacred space’. Ritual takes place, and makes place in this sense” (Knott 2005, 43). Knott’s analysis brings together Smith’s view of ritual outlined in *To Take Place* (1987), and combines it with Lefebvre’s spatial triad (Lefebvre 1991). Knott’s view on sacred space treats it as one of several ways in which space can be loaded with significance, in this case, religious significance.

The *how* of Muslim sacred space is largely described in situational terms. Werbner writes an account of a *julus*, a ritual procession, that takes place in Birmingham. She argues the processions “inscribe the name of Allah on the very spaces they cover” (1996, 181) claiming the space both for Islam, as well as their denominational approach to it. She argues that the *julus* is as “an act of assertion in a struggle between different Islamic approaches, all competing for local hegemony” (1996, 181). The *julus* is an example of Metcalf’s contention of the “portability” (1996, 6) of Islamic rituals, highlighted through the worship of Muslims in diaspora. “Muslim ritual requires no ‘sacred place’” (1996, 6) Metcalf argues, continuing that “there is no formula for consecration or deconsecration of a site of worship, and historically mosque sites have been used not only for praying, but for everything from doing business to levying troops” (1996, 6). Metcalf’s view of what constitutes sacred space can be inferred as being a space reserved for prayer, with a formal ritual of consecration. One might question whether Metcalf is imposing her own views onto research participants. Perhaps to the Muslims who worshipped there, the mosque is sacred, even if it is a place of business or levying troops. There are therefore some unanswered questions on the *how* of Muslim sacred space. What is the relationship between ritual and sacred space? How Muslims conceptualise the space of a mosque is also a relevant and unexplored issue. Is it sacred? And do any activities (such as business or whatever the modern equivalent of levying troops is) undermine or challenge this sacredness? Since scholarship on Muslim sacred spaces is still in its infancy such unanswered questions are not unsurprising. These are issues I hope to provide insight into within this thesis, addressing explicitly the issue of how a mosque balances its sacred activities with the otherwise “worldly” concerns of business and community organisation that may take place there.

The reader might note that I have been reticent in offering my own view of how sacred space is constructed and whether I locate myself in the situational or substantive approach. My own argument is that the two approaches are less contradictory or distinct than they appear, and I will be arguing for a more unified articulation of sacred space, one which recognises both the human agency of sacred space being “chosen”, as well as the emic narrative of sacred space being “discovered”. In offering this theoretical perspective, I also address the question of how the various activities of the mosque (some overtly sacred, such as the prayer, and some less so, such as business) are managed within a single sacred site.

### **The Where**

Kong introduces the idea of “official sacred space” (2001), those sites clearly marked as reserved for religion, such as mosques, churches and other places of worship. It is unsurprising that such sites are considered sacred. Official sacred spaces can be understood through Durkheim’s stress on the social dimension of religion. He identified sacred space as communal space, sacred as a consequence of

“belonging not to the priest or any other single person but to the whole tribe” (Pals 2006, 91). In contrast, unofficial sacred space is found in unexpected places, which Kong believes demands greater attention and research (2001, 228). These might be found in nature, or secular institutions. Unofficial as it is, in Eliade’s view, it is nature that holds the origin of sacred spaces, contending “the whole landscape is alive and its smallest details all mean something; nature is rich with human history” (1958, 367). Reimer-Kirkham et al. draw on Kong’s distinction to explore unofficial spaces in the healthcare setting, describing them as “thirdspaces<sup>2</sup>”, unique and meaningful places “carved out” of otherwise “banal” surroundings (2011, 205-206). Another approach is offered by Knott in *The Location of Religion* (2005) who explores where religion manifests in ordinary landscapes such as the street. Knott’s examination stresses the role of the body as a key location of where religion is centred, and thus a contingent part of sacred space. Chidester and Linenthal likewise identify that “the human body plays a crucial role in the ritual production of sacred space” which “revolve[s] around the axis of the living body” (1995, 10). The somewhat anti-climactic conclusion is thus that sacred space can be found everywhere, and scholars have developed a vocabulary to describe these various locations.

Nestled within this debate about where one expects to find sacred spaces (especially in consideration of “official” sacred spaces), it is possible to perceive a wider discussion about the role, and indeed, definition, of religion. A secularised conception of public space would restrict religion to specific places of worship and the home. A more fluid approach to religion, like that utilised by Knott (2005) is prepared to see religion everywhere and anywhere. Yet this discussion leads us to a revealing insight about how expectations of where things belong in space can themselves be sources of data, a stream of inquiry most strongly associated with Cresswell’s work on being in and out of place (1996). Expectations of and about sacred space were important during my fieldwork in revealing otherwise implicit or tacit aspects of religious and sacred spaces.

Muslim sacred space is likewise explored in a diversity of locations. Qureshi looks at the rituals of “*milad*”, “*zikh*”, and “*Qur’ankhwani*” (1996) amongst South Asians in Canada. She observes that the rituals are domestic. Yet Qureshi says that there has been a slow shift towards these rituals taking place in the mosque, writing that “increasing mosque activity no doubt reflects a recent and slowly growing trend toward solidifying and projecting a collective Muslim identity in the public domain” (1996, 59). Desplat claims that her co-edited collection (Desplat and Shulz 2012) “moves beyond interpretations that focus exclusively on the ritual character” of Muslim sacred spaces and instead look at the more “subtle and routinely everyday activities and interpretations by people who may not participate in ritual activities” (Desplat 2012, 10). The authors of the chapters locate Muslim

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from Edward Soja (1996).

sacred spaces in the city, from doorsteps to the entire city layout. The shrine has also been a prominent location for the study of Muslim sacred space (Strothman 2012; Samuel and Rozario 2012; Damrel 2013; Gross 2013). To utilise Kong's terminology, the study of Muslim sacred space is inclined to what can be called "unofficial sacred spaces". This inclination can be attributed to an interest in the exceptions often found amongst researchers, the relatively challenging nature of gaining access to the "official" sacred space of a mosque, as well as a general trend amongst anthropologists to study Sufism (McLoughlin 2007, 281). My detailed study of the construction of sacred space in the "official sacred space" of the mosque could be accused of lacking innovation, but given the absence of such an account in the literature, there is value in providing it.

### **The When**

The relationship between sacred space and time has only been briefly touched upon by scholars. According to Pals, Durkheim identified early on that "the sacred and the profane must also be kept from colliding in time" (Pals 2006, 104). Durkheim notes that there are specific times considered more sacred than others, leading to a diverse sacred timescape: -

"If the sacred beings always manifested their powers in a perfectly equal manner, it would appear inconceivable that men should dream of offering them services, for we cannot see what need they could have of them. But in the first place, in so far as they are confused with things, and in so far as they are regarded as principles of the cosmic life, they are themselves submitted to the rhythm of this life." (Durkheim 1915, 345)

Eliade also elaborates on sacred time through what he calls "hierophanic time" (1958, 388). He observes how there is a rhythmic structure behind both sacred times as well as calendars, writing "it cannot be denied that the rhythms of the cosmos also played a leading role in the 'revelation' and ordering of these systems of reckoning" (1958, 390). Both Durkheim and Eliade argue that time is not homogenous, and sacred time occurs in a patterned and rhythmic structure.

Chidester and Linenthal stress the importance of "orientation in space and time" (1995, 12) in the construction of sacred spaces, highlighting how the worshippers locate themselves temporally as well as spatially. An example of this orientation in time is presented in Metcalf's work on the *Tablighi Jama'at* (a large Muslim reform movement with transnational links and an ethos of travelling between mosques nationally and internationally). She concludes that for the *Tablighi Jama'at*, "what turns out to be at stake is not *space*, the new place where they have chosen to live, but *time*, in which the past and future converge in the present" (Metcalf 1996, 123, italics in original). It is a memory of the Prophetic past and an eschatological future (of heaven) that interrupt the present,



similar to Eliade's notion of the "Eternal Present" (1958, 392). Katz provides an overview of classical Islamic thought on sacred time in *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (2007). She observes that "the idea that time is inherently patterned, with some days or months intrinsically privileged over others, is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition" (Katz 2007, 143). Time is an important dimension in encountering the divine.

Stirrat provides an account of Eliade's notion of sacred time, arguing its defining characteristic is timelessness and spacelessness – "for Eliade the sacred is outside both time and space, forming a reality separate from that in which we live" (1984, 203). In Stirrat's view it is a model of sacredness largely of utility to the individual. By contrast, there is another model of the sacred "associated with the here-and-now, and which is concerned with the existence of time and space" (1984, 204). This is a sacred concept based on Durkheim's theorisation, and it is utilised not by the individual but by the community since it is concerned with the "sacralised social, forming a sacred model of society as well as a model for social life" (Stirrat 1984, 204). Interestingly Stirrat's models are not mutually exclusive, it is not a case of either/or. This unifying approach to Durkheim and Eliade's ideas is reflected in my own findings and explored in greater depth in Chapter Ten. Sacred time was also given attention by Paden, who writes: -

"Ritual time constructs its own space. It is a time to be "entered" by participants. It is a time that has an inside. Holy days are the best examples of this. The Jewish Sabbaths have been called 'cathedrals in time.'" (1994, 97)

Paden (perhaps more than others) notices what will be a key argument throughout my thesis - the interconnectedness of time and space. His metaphor "cathedrals in time" succinctly expresses this interconnectedness. Paden is also keenly aware of rhythms and routines in the "temporal geography" of religious worship (1994, 100).

While Durkheim and Eliade noted the relationship between the sacred and the rhythms of the cosmos, contemporary scholars of religion have not returned to their early contentions with a handful of exceptions (such as Paden), but Lefebvre's posthumous publication *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) suggests tentative ways in which rhythm may structure social life, and how these might be approached for study. Lefebvre writes that: -

"...everyday life remains shot through and traversed by great cosmic and vital rhythms: day and night, the months and the seasons, and still more precisely biological rhythms.

In the everyday, this results in the perpetual interaction of these rhythms with repetitive processes linked to homogenous time.” (2004, 73).

Everyday life is thus a product of rhythms, including the sacred. Continuing, Lefebvre observes that “this interaction has certain aspects that we will leave aside, for example the traditional links of social time to religious beliefs and prescriptions” (Lefebvre 2004, 74). While Lefebvre is content to leave aside the issue of religion and rhythm in his work, it is this very issue which I examine in the coming thesis. How do the daily rhythms that run through everyday life interact to produce sacred times and sacred places? Lefebvre makes a distinction between rhythms (which he calls cyclical) and repetitive processes (which he calls linear). “The cyclical originates in the cosmic, in nature: days, nights, seasons, the waves and tides of the sea, monthly cycles etc.” he argues, this can be contrasted with the linear, which “come rather from social practice, therefore from human activity: the monotony of actions and of movements, imposed structures” (2004, 8). My interest in Lefebvre and rhythms is not to say that I am turning my attention away from space and towards the temporal. It is instead to argue, as Lefebvre himself would agree, that the spatial *is* temporal. In Lefebvre’s words, “all rhythms imply the relation of a time to a space, a localised time, or if one prefers, a temporalized space” (2004, 89). The question of *when* sacred space is as much a question of *where*, despite separating the two in my literature review. My categorisation, as I have argued, is not to imply these characteristics are definite and fixed, but rather to show that the *when* of sacred space has largely been left unexplored. Rhythmanalysis, as Lefebvre posits it, has been utilised by a handful of scholars, but none within religious studies (see Smith and Hall 2013; Hopwood 2013; Bengtsson 2014 for sociological works that utilise rhythmanalysis). Between rhythms and orientation in time, however, there remains a great deal unconsidered: how the marking and consecration of space can also mark out time, whether the meanings of space can change over time, and how cosmic and other rhythms intersect with the construction of sacred space. The issues raised here regarding the *when* of sacredness will form a stream of inquiry in the coming thesis.

### **Summary of Sacred Spaces**

The dimensions of sacred space introduced above will all become relevant as I describe the sacred space of the mosque, and familiarity with them will help pronounce my own contribution, particularly to the temporal dimension. How a mosque figures as a site of Muslim sacred space has only been touched upon from the periphery, so an empirical contribution to the question of *where* sacred space is located is provided in my work. Beyond that however, I outline a time-sensitive and rhythm-conscious theory of sacred space that builds upon theorisation of sacred space conducted by other scholars. I will be adding to the work and theorisation begun by Durkheim and Eliade, which

are described contemporarily as substantive or situational by Chidester and Linenthal (1995). However, my thesis will argue that these divisions are less concrete than may appear, and I make the case for the importance of both Durkheim and Eliade's approaches to be unified in Chapter Ten of this thesis.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter surveys the literature on British mosques, emerging from a multidisciplinary field of contemporary Islamic studies, followed by literature on sacred space. Both are multidisciplinary fields but tied closely to religious studies, sociology, and anthropology. At the outset, I indicate that the bulk of my empirical contribution lay in the study of British mosques, and the bulk of my theoretical contribution lay in the study of sacred space. In the first part, it is demonstrated that the literature tends towards a focus on mosques in a space, rather than the space within mosques, and that an in-depth study of a single mosque would contribute to and complement existing knowledge of mosques. In the second part, sacred space is examined as a theoretical tradition, and in particular, the emphasis on sacred space as socially constructed. In focusing on Muslim sacred spaces, I demonstrated that the literature has yet to fully engage with a mosque as a site of sacred space, which leads to my claim of originality – an ethnographic study illuminating the ordinary and everyday life of a mosque, with attention paid to the construction and maintenance of sacredness. I also identify that the temporal dimensions of sacred space will be an area to which I intend to contribute, utilising Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). In the next section, I describe my methodological decisions and practice, which also furthers my argument on the value of ethnography.

## **Section Two - Methodology**

## **Chapter Three – Ethnography and the Study of Religion**

### ***Introduction to Section Three***

By calling myself an ethnographer, I am making a claim both to the outcome of my research (an ethnography) as well as my method. Through the three chapters in this section, I outline my methodology. This chapter begins with an overview of ethnography and the study of religion. It traces the traditions to which I lay claim, and which have influenced me in my research into religion. Chapter Four looks at my methodological practice, describing how I conducted research by drawing upon a range of ethnographic tools available. Chapter Five continues this theme, and is titled *The Ethnographic Journey*. It considers the issue of reflexivity, articulating how I positioned myself in the field and dealt with the various issues that arose during research. Taken together, these chapters provide the reader with an insight into how I conducted my ethnography, how I dealt with my “data”, and how I fashioned the ethnography that will follow in Section Three.

### ***Introduction: Ethnography and the Study of Religion***

In this chapter, I demonstrate how I locate myself in a wider tradition of ethnography. Unlike the previous chapter, I am not introducing empirical research I am contributing towards, nor presenting theoretical considerations I intend to develop upon. This chapter will not be an overview of the anthropology of Islam, a necessary statement of clarification simply for the centrality of ethnography to the anthropological tradition. Rather I am outlining several approaches to ethnography that have influenced my own methodology. These are the sociological study of religion in situ, a consideration of space and place, a reflexive approach to research, attentiveness to conflict and its implications, and a concern for offering thick descriptions. The literature is organised chronologically, utilising Denzin and Lincoln’s “moments” (2000) for their value in providing an orientating overview of the key trends and debates within social science research, a structure I find convincing and useful in observing the “big picture” shifts in ethnography. The scholars and works cited are introduced for their influence upon my own research and their contribution towards the scholarly inquiry into religion. I hope to make clear to the reader the relationship between the ethnographic method and the distinctive features of my ethnography which follows in Section Three.

### ***Anthropology, Ethnography and the Study of Religion***

Given that my study looks at a single mosque only, I was questioned by a member of the interview panel when applying for funding about the applicability of my findings to other mosques. My response was to assert that the in-depth findings from a single site have utility in and of themselves and provide a basis for future scholars who seek deeper and meaningful understandings of other mosques. What follows is in some ways an answer to the same question. Why focus on the

particular over the general? What value lies in conducting a study of such a bounded site? And what are the merits of the ethnographic method? I answer the question by tracing the development of ethnography itself, which occurred alongside the emergence of comparative religious studies. The term ethnography, as well as the origins of religious studies, can be located in the figure of Edward Burnett Tylor “who placed a pioneering emphasis on ‘ethnography’ and ‘ethnology’” (Pals 2006, 20). His contribution to the study of religion is largely found in *Primitive Culture* (1958 – originally 1871) within which he argued for the centrality of animism in understanding the religious practices of “primitives” in a “systematic, sequential fashion, with scores of examples at his disposal” (Pals 2006, 28). Despite his role in the origins of ethnography, few would recognise his work as fitting within the modern scholarly definition of it. Tylor undertook no field research of his own. Instead, he brought together accounts from across the globe quite carelessly and casually. He did, however, powerfully argue the case for the systematic study of human society, and for the study of religion as social phenomenon.

The impression of ethnography we have today derives much more from Malinowski than Tylor. Malinowski had little time for the theorisations and musings of Tylor and his colleagues, who have since been caricatured as “armchair anthropologists”. Instead, Malinowski outlined a new approach, one rooted in fieldwork. His introduction to *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* became a founding text for this new development in ethnography. He stressed the importance of stating one’s methodology, “results of scientific research in any branch of learning ought to be presented in a manner absolutely candid and above board” (1932, 3), of embedding oneself in the social environment of study (“he [the anthropologist] ought to put himself in good conditions of work, that is, in the main, to live without other white men, right among the natives” (1932, 6)), and of bringing a theoretical agnosticism to the field, contending that “preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker” (1932, 9). He was not entirely unsympathetic to Tylor, remarking that “the early efforts of Bastian, Tylor, Morgan, the German Völkerpsychologen have remoulded the older crude information of travellers, missionaries, etc., and have shown us the importance of applying deeper conceptions and discarding crude and misleading ones” (Malinowski 1932, 9). However, there was no mistaking that Malinowski intended a different methodology to his predecessors and, in that respect, was successful in ushering in a new approach to anthropological inquiry. His methodological shift also had an impact on theorising and studying religion. Thrower argues that: -

“One of the chief merits of Malinowski’s work was the respect that it showed to the religious data of the people whose way of life and outlook on the world Malinowski was

seeking to understand... After Malinowski, students of primitive societies – even armchair ones – could no longer approach primitive religion in the patronising, dismissive way that had characterised so many eighteenth and nineteenth-century approaches” (Thrower 1999, 116).

This development is representative of a wider shift. Early works of comparative religious studies, such as *The Golden Bough* (Frazer and Fraser 1998 – originally 1906–15), *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Eliade, 1958) and Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1958 – originally 1871) offered global theories, dealing superficially with dozens of religious traditions. Malinowski’s example argued for the importance of in-depth studies of a single case, and countless scholars have followed in his footsteps. Franz Boas is often described as the “father of American anthropology” (Stocking 1974), an appellation that might be applied to Malinowski in terms of his influence on British anthropology (though Radcliffe Brown stands as a formidable contender to the same title). In the wake of Malinowski and Boas followed works such as *Naven* by Bateson (1958 – originally 1936), *Coming of Age in Samoa* by Mead (1961 – originally 1928), *The Nuer* by Evans-Pritchard (1940), and *The Lele of the Kasai* by Douglas (1963). These ethnographies can be recognised by their focus on the specific and bounded field, the interest in studying the “other” – usually a distant and far-flung community, and their desire to understand the local context of their participants. Qualitative research has developed considerably, both theoretically and in practice, since Malinowski. Nonetheless, all subsequent ethnographies, including my own, draw from these early attempts at describing the lived social realities of communities. In the study of religion, ethnographers forced the existing grand explanatory theories to contend with the day-to-day experiences of the religious.

Malinowski was an important figure in the shift from looking at the general to the singular. However, Durkheim too was an important voice in this movement. His contentions regarding the sacred and the profane have been presented in Chapter Two. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim 1915), the reader is introduced to what the author contends is the most basic form of religion – totemism - evidenced through an in-depth study of Australian Aborigines. In a masterful and compelling argument, Durkheim seeks to demonstrate that worship of the totem is itself worship of the social bonds between tribesman, and thus all deities and rituals are simply a means to strengthen kinship, belonging and solidarity, which are vital aspects to social survival. Not only was this an original theory of religion for its time, but it was also the first development of sociological functionalism. Durkheim represented a change in the approach of many scholars who felt the comparative studies of societies and religions were too broad, encouraging superficial theorisation. Instead, Durkheim believed that one only needed to find the appropriate case study,

and explore it in-depth, as Durkheim contends he did (“these tribes will give us a chance to make an experiment, as it were, whose results, like those of every well-made experiment, are susceptible of generalization” (Durkheim 1915, 246)). Malinowski and Durkheim, therefore, both indicate a shift towards exploration of the particular, and set the academic context in which another key researcher emerged, a student of Malinowski - Evans-Pritchard, part of the anthropological school of ethnography (Burawoy 2000).

Towards the end of his career, Evans-Pritchard delivered a series of lectures at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, that would be collated and published as *Theories of Primitive Religion* (1965). In this work, Evans-Pritchard sought to deconstruct what he saw as decades of fallacy in the study of religion. Through the book, he sets out to “show why theories at one time accepted are unsupportable and had, or have, to be rejected wholly or in part” (Evans-Pritchard 1965, 4). Much like Malinowski, he advocates for fieldwork, writing that “it is a remarkable fact that none of the anthropologists whose theories about primitive religion have been most influential had ever been near a primitive people” (Evans-Pritchard 1965, 6). Relevant to the ethnography of religion, Evans-Pritchard goes further, and contends: -

“statements about a people’s religious beliefs must always be treated with the greatest caution, for we are dealing with what neither European nor native can directly observe, with conceptions, images, words, which require for understanding a thorough knowledge of people’s language and also an awareness of the entire system of ideas of which any particular belief is part, for it may be meaningless when divorced from the set of beliefs and practices to which it belongs.” (1965, 7)

Within this general statement of theory one can observe the case for ethnography of religion and for the significance of language. Attention to the words used by the research participants, consideration of the subtleties of meaning, the implication of one word being used over another, and the value of using emic terms are part of Evans-Pritchard’s approach to ethnography. Evans-Pritchard was arguing, in part, for the importance of ethnography in the project of gaining a deeper and more accurate understanding of religious practice. It was not simply that one had to do fieldwork to understand the religion of a people, but that religion itself had to be understood in-situ, in a full context, with a wide-ranging appreciation for the particular, rather than the general. In remarking on the accounts of travellers and missionaries on which the earliest theorisation was done, Evans-Pritchard makes another observation, that “magic, barbaric religious rites, superstitious beliefs, took precedence over the daily empirical, humdrum routines which comprise nine-tenths of the life of



primitive man and are his chief interest and concern" (1965, 8). The "everyday" was Evans-Pritchard's focus as an ethnographer. By focusing on language, on fieldwork, and on the everyday, Evans-Pritchard shows how much of the widely-held ideas about primitive religion (namely the theories of Tylor, Durkheim and Freud) were deeply flawed. At best, they are "common-sense guesses" (Evans-Pritchard 1965, 120) but at worst, misleading and misrepresentative. His confidence emerges from his own substantial research, particularly on the religions of Africa. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Evans-Pritchard 1937) was his first publication, but it was his works on the Nuer (1940; 1951; 1956) that earned him his reputation as an ethnographer. The legacy of the early anthropological studies on religion was to make the case for the value of fieldwork, to move from general theories towards the particular and specific, and from extraordinary festivals or rites, to the everyday and humdrum.

### ***Space, Place and the City***

In studying a British mosque, my own ethnography has more in common with the sociological ethnographers than the anthropologists. While anthropological ethnographers examined the religion of tribes in remote parts of the world, sociologists began looking at their more immediate surroundings. Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto* (1956) is counted among the early classics of the Chicago School of Ethnography, examining how Jewish migrants adapted to life in the city. The study was not interested in Jewish religious practice, such as worship or ritual, but was more a consideration of Jews as a disadvantaged migrant community. Wirth's study differed from anthropological works on several counts, including his desire to demonstrate how Chicago's Jewish community navigated and adapted to life in an urban environment, setting the tone for sociological studies of religion in a way that differentiated it from anthropology. The distinctions between the two are blurred however. Religious studies scholar Ninian Smart contends that "as for sociology and anthropology, they are in my opinion the same subject, but they have different traditions" (1999, xi), and it is those differing traditions which are gestured towards in this section. The Chicago School of Ethnography is a suitable representation of the sociological tradition, and though religion was not the priority for Chicago ethnographies, their focus on the city and institutions has a marked influence on subsequent congregational studies as well as secularisation studies.

The Chicago School argued that there were universal human constants, and these constants could be equally discovered in Chicago as they could be in remote Pacific Islands. Issues such as race (Frazier 1932), politics (Gosnell 1927), and homelessness (Anderson 1961) were subjects of exploration. Cressey's study of *The Taxi-Dance Hall* (2008 – originally 1932) is one example of the ethnographies that established Chicago's reputation. It examined the challenges and tensions of individualism, anonymity and the breakdown of familiar communal relationships within Chicago and

the unique ways these challenges and tensions were negotiated. Cressey argued the unique space that existed in the dance halls served to undermine and subvert social structures and hierarchies, particularly those related to race. It can also be identified as the earliest shift in ethnography towards studies that began to consider the implications of space and place. This move is a noteworthy one, and Cressey pre-empted the spatial turn that would characterise later sociology (Warf and Arias 2009). As the Chicago School ethnographies sought the universal laws of human interaction, they decontextualized their studies as far as possible. What was happening in their local city could happen anywhere, according to the Chicago School. This decontextualisation is critiqued by Burawoy (2002, 12) who avers that it failed to appreciate the unique and aspects of Chicago, and disregarded the nexus of external influencing forces in which Chicago was caught up.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, 8) define the work of the Chicago School (and Malinowski) as representative of the “first moment” of qualitative social science. The first moment is characterised by researchers who “wrote ‘objective,’ colonializing accounts of field experiences that were reflective of the positivist scientist paradigm” and the subjects were essentialised as “alien, foreign, strange” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 7). Denzin and Lincoln’s characterisation of the first moment reveals the ways in which sociology and anthropology developed a language to deal with the issues of reflexivity which would become increasingly prominent in subsequent years.

In the previous chapter, I described the origins of the study of the sacred which in turn led to a study of sacred space. This shift was the product of a “spatial turn” in sociology which impacted upon religious studies. The origins of this shift can be traced to what is called the Second Chicago School. A new institutional focus of the Second Chicago School was led by scholars such as Goffman, who had an interest in the social use and agency of space. Goffman’s (1959; 1963) ideas on space and public performance were seminal, in particular his theory of frontstage/backstage in structuring social interaction. The Second Chicago School continued its study of the city. However, it became increasingly focused on places where space, profession and community all interacted. Goffman and his colleagues also took space and place seriously – it was no longer relegated to the backdrop to the interesting social action, but recognised as integral to it. These three loose themes - of space, of institutions, and of performance - influence my own approach to researching the mosque. I am interested in many of the same questions about the role of space, the operation of the mosque as an institution, and the ways in which meaning is ascribed to (or derived from) these.

### ***Conflict, Negotiation and Tension***

Anthropological ethnographies during this period went through a significant development, particularly around the issues of reflexivity, bias and the accusation of complicity in colonial endeavours. Thrower argues that “Malinowski and the structural functionalists were seen as having

benefited from colonialism and were charged with having actively supported it. In their monographs, they ignored or minimized the role of the colonial state” (1999, 19). This raises the issue of reflexivity once again. This debate also influenced the evolution of what came to be known as the Manchester School of Ethnography, which emerged following the Second World War. The school’s founding classic, authored by Wilson, is his study of detribalisation in Northern Rhodesia (1941), which began a series of methodological innovations that set the Manchester School apart from its contemporaries and indeed even later ethnographies. The “extended case study”, as termed by its founder Max Gluckman, and sometimes also called situational analysis, was not simply ethnography by another name, but a shift in practice and perspective.

A key belief entailed by the founders of the extended case study was a scepticism about the search for generalised rules of society. Situational analysis argues for the principles and values of a group to be understood in practice. Van Velsen, a Manchester anthropologist and proponent of situational analysis, adopts the language of post-structuralism and argues “structural analysis aims at presenting an outline of social morphology; consequently, there is a marked emphasis on consistency so that variations are ignored in its abstractions” (1967, 136). To remedy this, Gluckman and the Manchester School emphasised the particularities and specifics, including the aberrations from an idealised norm. The important belief that underpins many of the Manchester School ethnographies is that an “individual’s conflicting loyalties to different groups, based on different principles of organisation, may ultimately contribute to social cohesion” (Van Velsen 1967, 139). Ethnographers of the Manchester School produced several influential texts, such as *The Drums of Affliction* (Turner 1968), *The Kalela Dance* (Mitchell 1956), and Gluckman’s own work such as *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (1955) and *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa* (1963). The willingness of the Manchester School to adopt a variety of theories available from a variety of disciplines is the distinguishing aspect of what Denzin and Lincoln consider to be “the third moment” of ethnographic and qualitative research (2000, 9). This moment is characterised by methodological plurality and attention to the questions of reflexivity. The focus on conflict as a means of understanding the cohesive whole, rather than as an exception to it, was also a significant contribution to the study of human societies. The Manchester School’s extended case study abandoned the bounded fieldsite, instead moving across space as deemed necessary to explore the issue.

The introduction of the Manchester School is provided here for its two significant influences upon ethnography. The first is its approach to embracing the subjectivity of the researcher in the research process, which came to bloom in later works such as *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Rabinow and Bellah 1977), but also for its approach to considering the utility and function of conflict in a wider social environment. The role of conflict in providing coherence to social contexts,

is of interest to me. Sacred spaces are so often spaces of conflict that the Manchester School's approach helps to contextualise conflict in my own fieldwork, and leads to my contention that conflict can be a means of underlining the sacredness of space and time (explored in Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten).

### ***Multi-Sited Ethnography***

The Manchester School eschewed the emphasis on a single location for fieldwork and decided instead to "follow the conflict" (Marcus 1995, 10), one strategy among many that ethnographers were using in favour of a traditional bounded fieldsite. In *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography* (1995) Marcus outlines multi-sited ethnography with trepidation, proposing its utility while simultaneously outlining the anxieties multi-sited ethnographies hold for him; namely, "testing the limits of ethnography", "attenuating the power of fieldwork", and "the loss of the subaltern" (1995, 99-101). In the years since however, multi-sited ethnography has shifted from being an innovative method at the periphery, to a familiar part of the landscape of qualitative research. Indeed, there are now several textbooks on conducting multi-sited fieldwork (Falzon 2009, Coleman and Von Hellermann 2011). Candea however provides an articulate defence of the bounded-field site, valuable to me given that I have opted to undertake a study that (in appearances at least) returns to the single-site. Candea's main critique of multi-sited approaches is "its lack of attention to the processes of bounding, selection and choice" in fieldwork (2007, 169). He argues that the value of a bounded field site is to take agency and control for the decisions the researcher must inevitably make in the field about what to investigate, where to look, and what to ignore (Candea 2007, 180). Candea provides a two-fold defence of the bounded site. On one hand, it serves as an "arbitrary location", which is an "actually existing instance, whose messiness, contingency, and lack of overarching coherence or meaning serve as a 'control' for a broad abstract object of study" (Candea 2007, 180). On the other hand, bounding the field helps the scholar recognise the incompleteness of their study, "the *decision* to bound off a site for the study of 'something else', with all the blind-spots and limitations this implies, is a productive form of methodological asceticism" (Candea 2007, 180, italics in original).

My decision to conduct a research project on a British mosque does not, necessarily, entail a bounded field site. I could have explored the contours of mosque engagement to a variety of locations. The desire to discover the significance of the physical mosque shaped my decision to restrict my field, as did recognition that the sprawling activity of even a single mosque could not be adequately researched in a single doctoral thesis. Candea's attitude of awareness, stressing the need for the researcher to recognise how and when they make decisions that impact upon the researcher

is indicative of a wider shift identified by Denzin and Lincoln as the “reflexive moment” (2000, 577), to which we turn our attention now.

### ***Reflexivity***

There is an increasing prominence of British Muslim researchers conducting research with British Muslim participants (Gilliat-Ray 2014, 77). As I am part of this trend, the question of reflexivity is present within my thesis. It is an issue which numerous scholars have wrestled with, evidenced through Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) assertion that attention to reflexivity characterises the fourth moment of social sciences. During the zenith of the Second Chicago School, Alvin Ward Gouldner began re-writing the principles that guided sociological inquiry, and argued in favour of abandoning notions of “objectivity”, an ideal he felt misled the social scientist into a false sense of security (Gouldner 1970). The Manchester School was accused of being complicit in new forms of colonialism, racism and symbolic violence that were subtler than in Malinowski’s era but equally problematic (Burawoy 2000, 20). The criticisms of schools which had made efforts to address issues of objectivity and reflexivity show that reflexivity and questions of bias are not issues to be “dealt” with and then moved beyond, but are continuing exercises of debate, discussion, and reflection. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000, 7-11), the confidence in the objectivity of the researcher (or even the need for it) was being replaced by recognition of the subjectivity of the research process, the importance of recognising ontological and epistemological diversity and the need to develop ways to ensure research, though subjective, was still rigorous and reliable.

A powerful advocate for the need for reflexivity was Bourdieu. Among his many notable contributions to sociology was his insistence on a reflexive sociology, one that recognised subjectivities rather than ignore them (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Several sociologists took his ideas to heart, such as Paul Rabinow. His ethnographic study of Morocco (1975) was accompanied by *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Rabinow and Bellah 1977) in which he confidently opened his research experience to readers. He shares moments of anger and frustration, states openly his engagement with prostitutes and with ecstatic Sufi worship – thereby challenging notions of the detached scholar. The development of reflexivity was accompanied by the development of feminist theory. Among the most persuasive works on the need for reflexivity is Judith Okely’s *The Self and Scientism* (1975), in which she powerfully argued for abandoning notions of objectivity and encourages other researchers to openly engage with the challenges posed by reflexivity. Due to the work of Okely, Rabinow, Bourdieu and others, reflexivity has moved from being a peripheral concern to one which is now a significant consideration for ethnographic scholars. In my immediate context, this is evidenced by the Cardiff School of Ethnography’s self-stated commitment to reflexivity (Delamont et al. 2001).

In the study of religion, there are two specific ways in which reflexivity needs to be considered. The first is the conclusion Denzin and Lincoln identify, namely that part of the crisis of representation which identifies the fourth moment of social science will be resolved through the inclusion of the “Other” in research. They note this may be through various models of participatory research, or through the “Other” conducting their own research (Denzin and Lincoln 2001, 577). It is the latter that is relevant to my study, British Muslims researching British Muslims. Religion, however, also presents other types of boundaries, not just of sociological belonging, but of belief or absence of it. Evans-Pritchard, for example, argues for the role of the believer in ethnographies of religion, stating that “the non-believer seeks for some theory – biological, psychological, or sociological – which will explain the illusion; the believer seeks rather to understand the manner in which a people conceives of a reality and their relations to it” (1965, 121). I argue in Chapter Five that abandoning simplistic indicators of belonging or not belonging in favour of a more dynamic understanding of relationships provides a more fruitful direction for progress. Indeed, the development of phenomenological studies of religion, which have arguably abandoned the desire to explain religion in the way Evans-Pritchard complains of, has not been one uniquely championed by religious “insiders”. This reveals that Evans-Pritchard’s is mistaken in his contention that “the non-believer seeks for some theory” to contextualise belief. Simplistic conclusions based on “belonging” have limited value, something I argue in describing my own approach to reflexivity, as outlined in the coming chapter, *The Ethnographic Journey*. Nonetheless, the prominence of reflexivity has left a marked impact upon both ethnography as well as the study of religion, in which insider-outsider debates continues – and is the topic of two forthcoming books (see Chryssides and Gregg 2017 and McCutcheon and Gregg 2017 – both unpublished).

### ***Thick Description***

Taking a step back chronologically, I turn in this section to Clifford Geertz. He is an appropriate giant of ethnography upon which to end. For one, my thesis intends to be a thick description in a Geertzian sense. Also, Geertz’s significant outputs centred on Islam in North Africa and Indonesia and so, as a scholar of religions and of contemporary Islam, he is representative in many ways of the tradition within which I locate myself. Finally, it is valuable to compare Geertz with Tylor, the father of ethnography mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The evolution of ethnography is most pronounced when these two figures are compared. Tylor looked at a huge range of religions; Geertz focused only on one. Tylor’s ethnography was one of comparisons and abstractions of compiled documents. Geertzian ethnography is an exercise in particularity and attention to detail combined with extensive fieldwork. Geertz’s key theoretical contribution to the field of sociology and anthropology is often cited as *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), a work which contended “to see

all religions through the eyes and ideas of the people who practice”, which “marks a further step on the path already entered by Weber, Eliade and Evans-Pritchard” (Pals 2006, 260) and also introduced the role of “thick description”. In his ethnographic works, which particularly focused on Islam in Indonesia, he challenged the ideas of functionalists such as Durkheim, and those who attempted to draw large overarching theories. This chapter began with Tylor, who having conducted no fieldwork himself, compared several religions to arrive at his theories on primitive religion. By contrast, in the preface to *Islam Observed*, in which Geertz compares a single religion (Islam), in two locations (Indonesia and Morocco), he writes the following about his own comparisons: -

“What results can only be too abbreviated to be balanced and too speculative to be demonstrable. Two cultures over two thousand years are hardly to be compressed into forty thousand words and to hope, besides, to interpret the course of their spiritual life in terms of some general considerations is to court superficiality and confusion at the same time.” (Geertz 1971, vi)

The trepidation and hesitation with which Geertz offers his comparative analysis (which is relative to Tylor’s work is much less ambitious) reflects a shift in the mood of anthropology and ethnography. There are fewer claims to universal rules, such as those sought by the Chicago School, and a greater attention paid to the particular and the idiosyncratic. Geertz is also sceptical of the way in which “the Tylolean kind of pot-au-feu theorizing about culture can lead” into a “conceptual morass” (Geertz 1973, 4). This also reflects Geertz’s interest in meaning and significance, which he outlines in the *Interpretation of Culture*, agreeing with Weber that: -

“...man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.” (1973, 5)

This is helpfully summarised by Daniel Pals: -

“It must be clearly understood, says Geertz, that ethnography, and so all of anthropology, is always a matter of thick description. Its aim is never to just describe the mere structure of a tribe or clan, the bare elements of a ritual, or say, the simple fact that Muslims fast in the month of Ramadan. Its task is to discern meanings, to

discover the intentions behind what people do, to detect the overarching *significance* they attribute to their rituals, institutions, and beliefs” (2006, 267).

Thick description is then a way of unravelling the “webs of significance” attached to various actions, rituals and interactions. Geertz presents his own response to this debate of universal versus specific by arguing that “understanding a people’s culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity”, reflecting that “the more I manage to follow what the Moroccans are up to, the more logical, and the more singular, they seem” (1973, 14). One can infer from Geertz a belief in a deep grammar for social action, that once understood, makes human activity intelligible across boundaries of culture and belief. Geertz’s work is significant enough to warrant a passing commendation from Said in *Orientalism* (1978, 327), which is due in part to his attention to the particularities rather than global narratives.

Geertz’s approach to the description of ritual, practice and religious belief provide a model for studies conscious of space and in particular the ritual worship of Muslims. Werbner and Barton, whose work was introduced in Chapter Two, applied a Geertzian approach in their studies of Muslims and mosques respectively. McLoughlin (2007), who provides a brief but comprehensive account of the anthropology of Islam, notes however that not all hold favourable attitudes towards Geertz’s ethnographies. McLoughlin cites the commentary of Varisco, and his assertion that in Geertz’s work “flesh and blood Muslims are obscured, visible only through cleverly contrived representation and essentialized types” (Varisco 2005, 29). The danger of obscuring “flesh and blood” research participants remains a significant one in an ethnography that seeks to portray generalised ritual practices, as this thesis does. Nonetheless, it is the Geertzian project of offering a thick description which I pursue in my coming ethnography. I seek to mitigate this danger by providing extended ethnographic passages, which introduce the congregants of the mosque and seek to root the generalisations made about Jamia Masjid in specific and concrete instances of fieldwork.

### **Summary**

This potted history of ethnography introduces several key names and developments. It aims to establish the way in which ethnography has contributed to religious studies, from Durkheim’s notion of the sacred as social to Geertz’s thick description. It outlined the way in which in-depth studies, rooted in the particular, helped direct the study of religion away from overarching theories, such as those proposed by Tylor, to the precise, exemplified by Evans-Pritchard. The Chicago School opened two new avenues to understanding religion. The first was a shift away from examinations of belief and theology, and instead a consideration of religions as communities, seen through Wirth’s *The*



*Ghetto* (1956). The second was a heightened awareness of space and place, opening the way for studies of sacred space that would follow. The Manchester School's approach to conflict and tension as a means of understanding, and indeed an essential characteristic of, communities and places directs my own approach to fieldwork. The reflexive turn of sociology and ethnography has also been touched upon, as it feeds into my own consideration as a Muslim conducting research in a Muslim context. The section concluded with Geertz who provides the key epistemological and ontological outlook through which I intend to offer a description of a mosque. To return to the question at the opening of this chapter, what is the value of a study of a single mosque? My response, in the spirit of Geertz, is to argue that the scholar of religion must seek deeper understandings of the particular, pronouncing the way in which actions and interactions are loaded with meaning, operate with a sense of coherency, and so provide an insightful perspective to the reader of how a single mosque operates beyond superficial details. The ethnography which follows in Section Three of this thesis attempts to reach this lofty goal.

## **Chapter Four – Methodological Reflections**

### ***Introduction***

In the preceding chapter, I provided an overview of the ethnographies and ethnographers who have influenced my own practice. In this section, I provide reflections on my methodological choices as well as fieldwork practice. A traditional “methodology” begins with a statement about research questions, and a rationalisation for the choice of research method based on these questions. Ethnography, which is usually inductive, is not suited to this structure. My own methodological journey reversed the traditional ordering – I chose the method, followed by a fleshing out of research questions. In the following section, I share with the reader the process of conducting the research, from inception to analysis.

### ***Why Ethnography?***

As mentioned in the introduction of my literature review, I have tentatively claimed that there are no ethnographies of a British mosque. The nearest is Barton’s monograph describing a mosque in Bradford (1986). I developed a familiarity with British mosques through my Master’s dissertation (Ahmed 2010) which looked at how “visual *dhikr*” (calligraphy and other symbolic decorations) sacralised mosques. The gap in the literature of empirical research inside mosques was conspicuous by its absence to me even then, especially when compared to the ubiquity of ethnographies of churches (Ammerman 1987; Stringer 1999; Versteeg 2010; Strhan 2015 to name but a few). The decision to conduct an ethnography was to address this gap in the literature, to provide an account of the mosque that was focused on the everyday and to provide a perspective on the meanings and space in a mosque and its functioning. I was confident that an ethnography, as the staple of anthropology and the heart of qualitative inquiry, would be valuable in and of itself before addressing any questions around what I was looking at. This approach is perhaps open to the criticism of putting the cart before the horse, but it is an honest account of the rationalisation for choosing to do an ethnography.

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions emerged out of the field itself, allowing my findings to dictate to me the areas which I would explore further. The approach loosely fits into what some have described as “grounded-theory” (Strauss and Corbin 2000), in that my research questions were informed dialectically with my research findings, and discovered “in the field”.

- 1) What are the daily activities of a mosque in Britain?
- 2) How are British Muslims engaging with/utilising the contemporary mosque?

- 3) Who are the mosque's attendees, and how do they relate to the everyday of the mosque?
- 4) What is significant about the mosque and the space inside of it?
- 5) How is this significance accomplished?

These questions shaped my observation strategy and shaped my fieldnote corpus as the ethnography, which took place over the period of a year, continued. By the close of fieldwork, I was resolute that two topics would be the focus of my thesis, the first is the congregation of the mosque, and the second is sacred space.

### ***Veni, Vidi, Vici***

Clifford Geertz, in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, writes "What does the ethnographer do? – 'He observes, he records, he analyses' – a kind of *veni, vidi, vici* conception of the matter" (1973, 19-20). For all the various definitions and conceptual descriptions of ethnography contained in methods books, this remains a succinct and undeniably accurate description of ethnography. It is for this reason that I organise my description of practice into these three categories; observing, recording, and analysing.

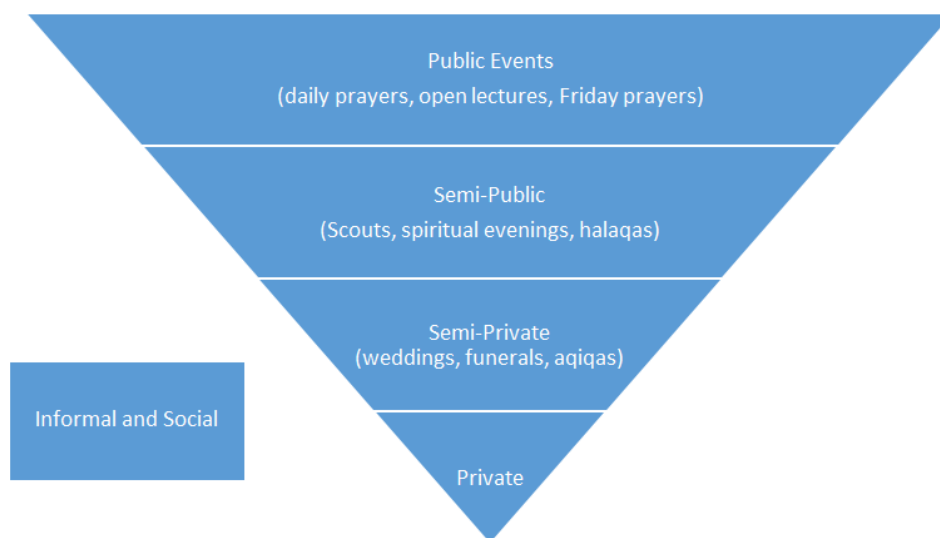
### ***Observing***

The primary source of data collection was participant observation, the core of which is "being there". My fieldwork began in Ramadan 2013 and concluded in Ramadan 2014, which in the Gregorian calendar is 13 months, from the beginning of July 2013 to the end of July 2014. Bookending my fieldwork with Ramadan was a choice made to ensure I observed the mosque through a full gamut of activities, and the timings also complemented my PhD research schedule. An account of gaining access is provided in Chapter Five. Once fieldwork began, the bulk of my interaction at the mosque consisted of two types of "being there". The first was when I was primarily an observer. The second was when I was primarily a participant. Unavoidably, there were times and events in which my participation was important and, therefore, observation could not be my primary focus. These include the Arabic classes I taught, or committee meetings I attended, open days at which I was volunteering, or when a task was requested of me (such as helping to pack the food for *iftar* in Ramadan). My strategies of data collection varied between the two modes of engagement. When an observer, I could use my notebook, audio recorder, or mobile phone camera to record action and make notes as things happened. When participating, such note taking was a luxury and often I would need to scribble things down or type a few words into my mobile phone to help me remember incidents or events for when I was able to write up fieldnotes. My initial strategy during the first month of fieldwork, which was Ramadan 2013, consisted of simply attending the mosque as often as possible. On some days, this could be as many as 20 hours spent in the mosque, as the cycle

of activity during Ramadan extended through a full 24 hours. Following Ramadan, I decided to attend the five daily prayers and any activities that were advertised or taking place in the mosque. This resulted in spending most evenings and weekends in the mosque, and visiting several times a day.

The “activities” of the mosque can be considered multi-layered. There is the top-level that include the five daily prayers and lectures, open to anyone. There are then the activities intended for a small segment of the congregation, such as the Scouts or “spiritual evenings” for the youngsters. Some events are semi-private: these are weddings, funerals, *aqiqas*. In theory, anyone can attend these events, but in practice, only the invited do. Finally, there are invite-only activities such as private meetings of sub-committees. Separate from this spectrum of activities are those which are informal, spontaneous and often social in nature, such as a group of friends discussing Premier League football after prayer. In the initial stages of my fieldwork, I focused on the top layers. I began navigating my way to the lower layers as time went on, negotiating access to the more private functions.

Figure 2



I also made an effort of “being there” when there were no activities or events scheduled. These lull times stimulated a consideration of the rhythm of the mosque. Were I to adopt an approach in which I only attended when something was happening, I would have been blinded to rhythmicity of mosque activities. I developed an observation schedule which prompted me to write down and record happenings (or lack thereof) every minute or every two minutes, regardless of whether it would have struck me as important at the time. This helped shape my fieldwork notes as not simply

a record of what took place, but what didn't. It conditioned me to attend to the atmospheric and more subtle "moods" of the mosque - such as the times when people whispered, and the times they spoke jovially, the times in which one could hear the nearby clock tower chiming, and the times when the mosque's own vibrant activity could be heard from across the street. Just like the mosque, my fieldwork included times of silence and inactivity.

### ***Recording***

Atkinson (1990) describes two processes in producing an ethnography. The first is writing down, the second and more familiar is writing up. He defines the former as the process in which the social world is inscribed onto paper following the participant observation of the researcher. The latter, writing up, is the period in which these written notes are recreated and reconstructed into a coherent and persuasive account that is contained within a book or a doctoral thesis. It is the "writing down" which I consider here, believing that participant observation as a method cannot be distinguished from the writing of fieldnotes. Despite this, there is a relative scarcity of texts that reflect on the process of writing fieldnotes (especially in comparison to the number of method texts on participant observation). The texts that are available on "writing down" include an edited collection of papers on how researchers use fieldnotes (Sanjek 1990) followed by a sequel of sorts looking at digital anthropology titled eFieldnotes (Sanjek and Tratner 2015), guidance on how to record qualitative research data (Lofland 2006) and an extensive guide by Emerson et al. (2011). Perhaps one reason for the relative paucity of texts is that "writing down" is a more idiosyncratic process than writing up, each individual brings their own preferences and habits to the process of recording. Nonetheless, fieldnotes are an integral part of the research process and thus I describe my "writing down".

### ***Recording - The Field***

Fieldnotes presume a "field". In early anthropology, the field was a relatively simple concept; the remote village or distant tribal home. However, modern ethnography has had to consciously disturb this definition, especially with the emergence of multi-sited ethnography (Falzon 2009). In my ethnography of the mosque, my field reflects the traditional bounded geographic locale of classic anthropology while also recognising that the mosque as a field is not a static concept, but moves, expands and contracts due to several influences. This takes inspiration from Candea's articulation of the bounded field (2007) not as a return to traditional conceptions but as a product of the lessons learned from multi-sited ethnographies. I also conceptualise the field in a Bourdieusian sense, which is a "structured place of social forces and struggle" (Bourdieu in Rey 2007, 44). The goal of a thick description is also served by considering the ethnomethodological school's view of a field as a site where interpretive action takes place (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 264). The mosque as a "field" was

something I needed to consider carefully, as assumptions about the nature of the field can “shape and constrain the writing of fieldnotes” (Emerson et al. 2001, 354). To give an example, prior to my fieldwork, I was confident that a mosque was not to be confused with a church in the way that a “church” may describe both a physical site as well as the body of Christian believers (a social community). Yet my fieldwork contradicted this assumption. The “mosque” was spoken of not only as a physical building, or an institution, but also the congregation, the faithful who attended and worshipped there. Thus, I was forced to engage with the question of “what, where and who is the mosque?”, and explore the conclusion with my research participants, discovering both the questions for my study and the answers with research participants (Emerson et al. 2011, 133).

### ***Recording - The Notes***

My notes were simply the who, what, where, and how. I often relied on my senses, describing what could I hear, smell, and see. Analytic reflections were also included, though I followed the advice of Emerson et al. (2011, 15-16) and kept these to a minimum. I used an asterisk to mark off analytic considerations and thoughts that occurred to me while writing the fieldnotes, allowing a straightforward way of separating them from observations. I was conscious throughout that fieldnotes are neither a comprehensive account of what happened nor a way to preserve the social world of the field - all ethnographic writing is a representation. The social world is understood by me, the researcher, and then reduced and recorded on paper (or digitally) for future consultation. I acknowledged that my descriptive accounts in fieldnotes are always selective, they “emphasise different features and actions while ignoring and marginalising others” (Emerson et al. 2011, 9). Furthermore, I could only be at one place at one time, and the “choice” of where to be could be restricted or sometimes non-existent. Accepting this partiality of the account helped me to make decisions about what I would choose to focus on, as well as constructing an account of the mosque that recognised its partiality while still attempting to provide a picture that was accurate. Writing fieldnotes took place away from the field at a desk. A full day of ethnographic observation could often take an hour or two to write up, sometimes considerably more. My richest and most descriptive segments were usually written “in the field”. I sometimes sat in the mosque during an activity or event, either with my laptop or a pen and journal, and recorded what was taking place. These sections were invaluable to me during analysis, as they provided a much richer level of detail – I would include the ambient sound, the lighting, the smells, the sights, many more direct quotes of research participants, and details that I might not have been able to recall if writing up after the fieldwork had taken place.

### **Recording – Organisation**

The corpus of fieldnotes began as a “day by day” chronicle of events, but which were sometimes reorganised through the production of “in process notes” (Emerson et al. 2011, 123) or “meta-fieldnotes”. Meta-fieldnotes were an opportunity to collate together fieldnotes thematically with a view of producing semi-analytic pieces of work. They provided an opportunity to see what might need further exploration in the field. Though not entirely reflecting strict “grounded theory” (Strauss and Corbin 2000), meta-fieldnotes allowed a dialectic relationship between analysis and fieldwork, where both inform each other. Alongside written fieldnotes, other fieldnotes included various documents, papers and material collected from the mosque. These included posters and leaflets placed in the mosque, the prayer timetables handed out every month and the odd publication that would be made available (such as *The Muslim Times* or the now defunct Muslim lifestyle magazine *emel*). These were collected alongside pictures, which were taken on an ad-hoc basis and drawings and sketches. Sometimes an image would act as a visual “jotting”, other times it would document areas or spaces that allowed me to analyse them at a later point. Audio and sometimes video recordings were also made of lectures and classes, as well as the ambient sound at certain times. This multimedia approach to fieldnotes is inspired both by a theoretical and practical underpinning. The theoretical underpinning relates to a desire not to artificially disconnect the social from the spatial and temporal. Space, place and the visual cues are entwined with the social happenings, all taking place at a particular and unique time. Thus, photography and audio recordings allowed a recontextualisation of the social with the spatial and the temporal (the temporal was helped by audio and video recordings). Recollections from memory often blurred time (in relation to objective time). A busy period can feel briefer than it was, a lull can feel longer than it was. This itself is important of course, perception and experience of time is a valid and important source of knowledge, but audio and video recordings provided a way to compare my experienced time with a quantified mechanical time. This multimedia approach is made possible by convergent technologies. I did not need to carry around a camera, an audio recorder and a notepad with me always, as a smartphone was capable of replicating all three. This allows for fieldnotes to be gathered from a variety of sources in a way which isn’t cumbersome to the researcher.

One of the most useful recording devices I utilised was an academic diary with page-a-day view. This A4 diary became a way for me to record all that took place on a day in short and brief detail - the events that occurred (whether or not I attended), my own observations recorded in a sentence or two, any other key remarks or happenings that took place at the mosque, and routine details such as who led the prayers, when the mosque was busy, and so on. This diary was invaluable to me as I became increasingly interested in the rhythm of the mosque, especially those rhythms that were longer than a single day, helping me to observe the “big picture” changes.

### ***Analysing***

My completed fieldnotes included handwritten notes, typed documents, cuttings, photographs and audio and visual recordings. The first step was to digitise those that needed to be. This meant transcribing fieldnotes from handwritten scribbles to word processed entries. It also required scanning posters, leaflets and hand-drawn illustrations into electronic files. I had a considerable wealth of audio and video data that I had recorded, either of interviews, *halaqas* or Friday sermons. These had to be transcribed. I converted all my images into jpeg, the most flexible format, and collated all my text into Microsoft Word format. I then organised my notes chronologically. By the completion of my fieldwork it was clear that rhythm and time would be important aspects of my analysis, and thus a chronological ordering provided an important conceptual framework by which I could access, assess, and analyse my data. Separate files were created for fieldnotes for each month - Ramadan 2013, September, October, through to Ramadan 2014. Folders were created to organise the images in the same way. These were then uploaded to NVivo and coded thematically.

The choice for NVivo was largely utility. It provided me three significant advantages. It allowed me to iteratively add codes, thus I could develop or change my coding framework, something which turned out to be necessary on more than one occasion. Second, NVivo allowed me to easily cross reference codes in a way that suited my analytic approach. The third reason was that NVivo facilitated the coding of photographs and audio files alongside the Word documents. The coding frame was decided in advance in collaboration with my supervisors, but was subsequently edited and changed as I created new codes I wanted to apply. I went through the fieldnotes fully two times, in each case adding more codes. I also sometimes unevenly added codes to certain sections as I reviewed them. Alongside 47 parent nodes (sometimes called “codes”, “labels” or “tags”) there were a further 40 child nodes used (codes that were applied within a primary node). Parent nodes, as they are called in NVivo, included labels such as “worship”, “festivals”, “sport” and so on. Child nodes would be subdivisions, for example “worship” was divided into categories such as “*fajr*” or “Reading Quran”. More than anything they provided a way to cut across time and space in my fieldnotes, viewing every instance of an action, or every mention of a particular theme. I utilised the chronological notes which were organised by month, moving between the micro (thematic, codes, isolated incidents, statements, decontextualized) and the macro (whole narratives, contextual) to arrive at analysis, either in the form of a contention or an observation. This process was not linear (i.e. starting with the thematic, to the chronological, to the abstraction) but dialectic and cyclical. A collection of narratives from the fieldnotes, either compiled directly from NVivo or otherwise pulled out and collated from the chronological fieldnotes would then be the basis upon which a chapter or section would be written.



### **Anonymity**

At the outset of my research, I did not intend to anonymise my findings. The mosque management had made it clear they were not only amenable to being named, but they were keen for Jamia Masjid to be recognised more widely through the research. It became clear however that I had a responsibility to my research participants to protect their identity, from each other as well as those outside the mosque. To achieve this, I anonymised my findings based on consultation with my research participants, allowing them an opportunity to choose pseudonyms and dictate, to some degree, how their participation was represented in my final thesis. So, at times, names have been changed, at other points, identities have been fractured and reconstituted. My key concern in anonymising my findings was to avoid any unintended consequences. I was conscious of both the guidelines of the American Anthropological Association (2012) to “do no harm” as well as a *hadith* which reflected the expectations of research participants about how I would conduct my research – “a Muslim is the one from whom the people are safe from his hands and his tongue” (Collection of An-Nasai). The anonymisation of the mosque is a thin veneer, created in consultation with the mosque management, but serves the purpose to add an extra layer of protection to the individual research participants, whose contribution and identity myself and the mosque management were keen to protect.

### **A Rhythm-Conscious Analysis**

It became clear to me very early on that an account of the sacred space of the mosque would invariably need to also be an account of the sacred time. The temporality of space was almost tangible within the mosque, as prayer times structured its activities clearly. In considering time within the mosque, I was led to a consideration of rhythms. Sacred time occurred in cycles, linked to lunar, solar and circadian rhythms. I found that Henri Lefebvre, philosopher and sociologist, had already developed a rich conceptual framework by which to begin analysing rhythms, and so somewhat by accident, I found myself a “rhythmanalyst” (Lefebvre 2004). But while I am interested in rhythms, my aim is not to produce a rhythmanalysis in the way Lefebvre envisaged it. For Lefebvre, rhythms themselves were the object of study, he “proposes nothing less than to found a new science, a new field of knowledge: the analysis of rhythms” (Lefebvre 2004, 3). In his early experiments with the idea, he approached rhythm as something akin to a foundational component to human civilisation, upon which the edifices of culture and commerce are built. And so, Lefebvre and Regulier (2004) consider whether cities are solar (agricultural and so based upon the seasons and harvest) or lunar (port cities with life tied to the lunar tides). My own adaptation of Lefebvre’s ideas is not to study rhythm in and of itself, but to use rhythm to shed light on something else

altogether. This thesis is a study of a mosque and sacred space, but one which is attuned and sensitive to rhythm. As such, I opt to call my ethnography rhythm-conscious.

I found Lefebvre's advice on conducting rhythmanalysis nonetheless valuable. The body, Lefebvre argues, "serves as a metronome" (2004, 19). Its internal rhythms of sleep, hunger, wakefulness, even down to the beating of the heart, are the most basic ways in which human beings experience time. Thus, all rhythms of the mosque, from the grand cosmic rhythms to the daily humdrum rhythms which will be introduced, are perceived and measured against my own embodied experience of them. Rhythm also provided value to me in discerning the dynamism of processes, especially the construction and deconstruction of sacred space. In his very idiosyncratic style, Lefebvre writes: -

"For him [the rhythmanalyst], nothing is immobile. He hears the wind, the rain, storms; but if he considers a stone, a wall, a trunk, he understands their slowness, their interminable rhythm. This *object* is not inert; time is not aside for the *subject*. It is only slow in relation to our time, to our body, the measure of rhythms." (2004, 20)

The contention that things are not inert or static, but always shifting, moving and operating according to a rhythm sometimes larger than those we are accustomed to perceiving, focused my attention on how apparent constants of the mosque were subject to change. Perhaps most importantly, Lefebvre stresses the significance of time; "the rhythmanalyst concerns himself with temporalities and their relations within wholes" (2004, 24). It was the temporalities and providing a full account of the sacred space that drew me towards rhythms, and so in this regard, I was keen to heed Lefebvre's advice on being concerned with the temporality and relation of sacred space within several different "wholes". Rhythmanalysis however is far from a refined activity, Lefebvre's own contentions were embryonic. The significance of rhythm, and my rhythm-conscious analysis, are better seen in "action" in the ethnography itself. The reader will encounter rhythm as an important theme through my ethnography chapters, and I provide a more extended discussion in Chapter Ten.

### **Summary**

I have provided an overview of my rationale for conducting an ethnography (which came before any conceptualisation of the research questions), and my own practice of Geertz's ethnographic *veni, vidi, vici*. I described the strategies I utilised in my observation, the ways in which I recorded data and how I came to analyse it. Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis has also been introduced, to prepare the reader for my contentions about rhythm and time. It is this, the changing and dynamic process of ethnographic research that I discuss next in Chapter Five as "The Ethnographic Journey".

## **Chapter Five – The Ethnographic Journey**

### ***Introduction***

The various debates regarding reflexivity and ethnography are succinctly introduced in Foley's article *Critical Ethnography: The Reflexive Turn* (2002) which, though published a decade ago, introduces many of the key debates about the role of the researcher vis-à-vis their research participants. Even in ethnographies in which a reflexive approach is not overtly included, the question of reflexivity is ever present, as I discovered whilst reading the work of the renowned Chicago School sociologist St Clair Drake. Drake is perhaps best known for his work *Black Metropolis* (Cayton and Drake 1946), but it was research he undertook in Cardiff that interested me. His doctoral thesis is a survey of Tiger Bay, the diverse and multicultural docks area of Cardiff (1954), which included details of Cardiff's first mosque that was established in the area. According to Back, the decision for the Chicago sociologist to travel to Britain to undertake research was not completely his own. Back (2009) writes that Drake "came to Tiger Bay in part because his white mentors thought he was "too close" to the issues of African American life to study them as a dispassionate anthropologist". The contention of Drake's mentors reflects a longstanding discussion within social science about objectivity, methodological rigour and authenticity of data and interpretations. In contrast to Drake, I conducted an ethnography in Cardiff partly because of my relationship to the ethnographic site. With the support of my academic supervisors, I embraced the opportunities and challenges of being "close" to the research participants.

In the following chapter, I present how I navigated the research field as an "insider". I outline my own response to the challenges posed by this. I utilise the metaphor of an "ethnographic journey" to describe my approach, as it highlights both my own agency as well as the bounded nature of my choices as I navigated the landscape of my fieldwork. It also describes the dynamic nature of ethnography, moving away from static "insider" and "outsider" definitions, instead providing an opportunity to reconceptualise my positionality as something which constantly changed. The negotiation of access is also given attention, as it was both helped and hindered by my pre-existing association with the research site. Finally, this chapter articulates the embodied nature of my research. A journey undertaken by an individual is restricted to a single perspective. Likewise, ethnography is an embodied activity which can only ever offer a single perspective. In both cases, what I see is influenced by who I am, just as who I am is influenced by what I see. In the following sections, I begin by considering the insider-outsider dichotomy and argue that it largely fails to capture the nuances of the research experience. I look at the impact of my ethnographic intentions in the field and with my research participants. I conclude by bringing these discussions back into the metaphor of the ethnographic journey, and how such a conceptualisation may provide a way to

discuss the challenges of conducting research where there is a pre-existing relationship between researcher and research participants

### ***Beginning the Journey – Moving Beyond Insider/Outsider***

To begin describing my ethnographic journey there are three questions to answer; where am I coming from? What do I bring with me? And where do I start? To answer “where I am coming from?” is to provide a history of my relationship with the mosque. My fieldwork began in 2013, whereas my relationship with the mosque began in 2004, when I was a college student. I began attending primarily after hearing about an *umrah* trip being organised through the mosque for young Muslims. I decided to make the *umrah* pilgrimage with the mosque, and attended a series of meetings intended to prepare those making the *umrah* on the practicalities of doing so. It was the first time I met Shaykh Talha, an imam at Jamia Masjid. My association with the mosque continued when I started university, and it was particularly strengthened when I was elected President of the university’s student Islamic Society. The society had strong links with the mosque as it was largely considered the “student mosque”. The mosque’s physical resources were always on offer to the Islamic Society. Jamia Masjid itself was founded by Muslim students, which encouraged the imams and members of the mosque management to consider those involved in the Islamic Society (ISoc) as “young leaders” and a human resource to cultivate. ISoc involvement provided a significant degree of cultural capital within the mosque. Within the context of the mosque, I was a “regular” and counted amongst the “*shabaab*” (literally meaning “the boys”, an informal term for the young adult males in the mosque). This history formed the cultural capital I brought with me on my ethnographic journey, which was an important currency used in gaining access and participation for my research.

### ***Where to Start? – Gaining Access***

The question of where to start is essentially the question of access. In traditional ethnographies, gaining access typically requires negotiating permission to be in the physical site of research. In my case, I already had access to the site (or at least, the men’s space – I discuss the gendered space of the mosque later in this chapter), and it was more a question of receiving permission to assume the mantle of the researcher within the field, which itself was a challenging and unnerving undertaking. This negotiation of access began with an informal conversation with Dr Abdi Hanif (who was the Mosque Manager until 2013). He had previously conducted qualitative research and was familiar with the *Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK* at which I was academically based. I knew Dr Hanif well and I was confident in his knowledge of the intricacies of social science research. For these reasons, I felt he was the best person with whom to explore the question of access. His response after I detailed my plans to him was “*insha’Allah*, that will be fine”. He was relaxed and positive about the idea. When I pushed on whether there would be objections, he mused that perhaps some

of the older “uncles”, particularly the more traditional “Pakistani uncles”, might not be keen on the project. I asked what their objections would be. “They won’t have a problem with you or the research, they just prefer the mosque to be quieter sometimes” was Dr Hanif’s response. After a period of consultation with my academic supervisors, I formalised the request with a letter.

An unexpected difficulty emerged in that I handed the letter to Dr Abdi Hanif, but the responsibility was transferred then to Dr Haqqani, who assumed the position of Mosque Manager in mid-2013 after Dr Abdi left Britain to begin an academic career abroad. I chased the question of access with Dr Haqqani on several occasions, who indicated to me that “yes, it is fine”, but he did not give me a fuller response of the type I was expecting. I had made a formal request and expected a formal response. I took the verbal permission as a positive sign, but felt I needed to do more groundwork of my own to ensure that I had the “access” I desired. As the beginning of my fieldwork approached, I mentioned it in passing to Uthman Yusr, a colleague with whom I worked closely. Uthman was also one of the three trustees of the mosque. He was not involved in the day-to-day running of the Jamia Masjid but was a significant figure in the mosque’s leadership and its early establishment. I was surprised to hear that he had not heard of the project, as I expected him to have received the letter I had submitted to Dr Haqqani and Abdi Hanif. Concerned, I emailed him a direct request for access including the letter I had submitted to Dr Haqqani. As it was a mere few weeks before the start of my fieldwork, I was anxious to ensure everything was in place. I sent the email on a Monday, and it was Saturday when I saw Dr Haqqani again, who approached me in private. It was the morning of the GCSE tuition classes and I had just finished teaching Arabic classes. Dr Haqqani said “Uthman spoke to me. I already told you, you can do your research. And anything you need, anything at all we can do, let me know”. I explained my concerns that Uthman did not receive the letter. His response was “but he doesn’t need to, we know you”.

Dr Haqqani was emphatic in his offer of support but it was only later that same day when I spoke to Dr Malik, a leading member of the mosque (though one who held no “official” position) that I realised the full implications of what had taken place. Dr Malik expressed that “I think Uthman thought you had not got permission. And so, he spoke to other trustees also. And they’re happy for you to do whatever you want in the mosque”. In my over-eagerness to ensure I had “access”, I realised I had gone above Dr Haqqani’s head, and inadvertently exposed him to criticism. In the traditional narrative of an ethnographic project, the researcher has power outside of the field. He or she dictates the way in which the research participants are represented. Within the field, the researcher is subject to the power of the various gatekeepers. In this case, my “gatekeeper” was Dr Haqqani. However, Dr Haqqani’s association with the mosque was not as extensive as mine. Nor did he hold the cultural capital I held having been Islamic Society President. He did not hold the same

personal relationships I held with the mosque management, particularly Uthman and Saeed Intishaar, two leading trustees. He was also new to his position, keen to make a positive impression after the departure of a well-known and well-respected face. I had not considered the “power” I held in the field, and the consequences of that power in negotiating access. Whereas I was concerned with gaining permission from “the powers that be” within the mosque, it dawned on me from this experience that my position meant that few would, arguably even could, reject my intention to conduct research in the mosque. In an effort to conduct research ethically thereafter, I recognised the need not to negotiate access with the hierarchy of the mosque, but through horizontal relationships, the congregation. This incident heightened my awareness of the need to carefully consider my position in the field. It was necessary for me to temper generic advice from methodological works (see Grills 1998, O’Reilly 2005, Gobo 2008) which stressed gaining permission and access from gatekeepers, with my own understanding of the mosque.

### ***Going Alien***

In my ethnographic journey, the official “sanctioned” start of my research was relatively easily won on account of my insider status. The more distinctively challenging aspects emerged from negotiating the relationships within the field. I do at times refer to my status as that of an “insider” but only as a shorthand way of referring to a cultural capital I hold because my biography and religious affiliation. It operates in tandem with other aspects of my identity, such as being male, young, and a university student. It was possible for me to be the outsider within the mosque, for example, in regard to a social group or a committee. This found expression as I neared the end of the fieldwork, in a process I can only describe as “going alien”. The dangers of “going native” are a staple warning of early anthropology. The concerns found more nuanced articulation in the work of Delamont and Atkinson, who write about the importance of “fighting familiarity” (1995). However, cultivating strangeness also led me to my own challenges. As the research process continued, I developed a sense of estrangement from the mosque. Late into my fieldwork, in Spring 2014, I recorded the following in my research journal.

The congregation left the second-floor hall after *dhur* prayers promptly. The only two people left in the mosque are myself and Mahmud, an elderly mosque attendee who regularly sits by himself in silence after prayers. He is resting with his back against the *qibla* wall. After reciting some prayers to himself, he sits in silence. Twenty minutes pass. The mosque is still, quiet enough for me to hear the breathing of Mahmud from the other side of the prayer hall. The lights are all switched off but the natural light from outside is more than enough. The skylight windows are open, and the sounds from the

street outside can be heard at a distance. I can also hear the odd passing car and groups of passers-by talking, sometimes the odd tweeting of a bird. At 2:30pm, I hear the distant chimes from the clock tower of City Hall half-a-mile away. The silence is disturbed by a young student who enters, sighing heavily. He is wearing a t-shirt and jeans, and is carrying a heavy backpack. He walks to a distant corner of the mosque which is almost a hidden recess, he slumps off his backpack and sits down, leaning against a wall. He doesn't pray or perform any ritual, instead he just sits. After a few minutes, his phone rings (it's switched to silent, but the vibration is still audible in the quiet mosque). He ignores the call and returns to his silence. Nearly half an hour passes with me, Mahmud, and the student each alone in our reveries.

This scene felt familiar to me, and after some reflection, I was reminded that I would sometimes come to the mosque as an undergraduate to simply have a moment of undisturbed silence. The relative stillness of the mosque between *dhur* and *asr* makes it a tempting location of seclusion, and the sacredness of the space helped create a sense of separateness from the world outside. I could remember several instances I visited the mosque as it provided an escape in the middle of the day, and I distinctly remember emerging from the mosque after my escapes feeling refreshed and calmed. It also dawned on me that despite being in the mosque at the same time as the student, witnessing the same silence, the mosque could no longer hold that same meaning for me. It was no longer a place of seclusion, but instead the central nexus of my academic studies. Jamia Masjid was incapable of being a place where I could escape my day-to-day life as it was so bound up in it. In the process of researching the meanings invested into the mosque, the mosque lost those same meanings for me. The realisation led to a very strong sense of loss, and one for which I was entirely unprepared. The research process changed my relationships and irreversibly so.

However, it was not only my relationship to the physical place of the mosque that changed on account of my researcher identity. I felt a strain on my relationships with the congregation at various points as my role was renegotiated through the fieldwork. This emerged out of an anxiety around my ethnographic intentions. Within Islamic theology, stress is placed on sincerity of intentions. Many collections of Prophetic teachings begin with the *hadith* "actions are by intentions" (Nawawi 1), stressing the importance of doing actions for the right reasons. The addition of an ethnographic intention into my presence at the mosque was something I wrestled with before beginning my fieldwork. As my research progressed, I became aware that my ethnographic intention made me feel distant from others in the mosque, and also sometimes recast me as an outsider in situations in which I expected to be dealt with as an insider, as I illustrate below. The overwhelming

bulk of the mosque's day-to-day running is managed by volunteers, who give their time freely to organise events, teach classes, deliver *halaqas*, and so on. In contributing to these activities, I was always conscious that I was not simply a volunteer, but acting in my role as researcher. An extract from a *khutba* delivered by a visiting imam in June 2014 provides a useful summary of the way in which I felt my intentions separated me from the rest of the congregation.

“We know the story of the *sahaba*. The Quraysh tortured the Muslims in Makkah. They even killed some. It became so bad it was unbearable. So, the Prophet said, ‘go to *Habasha*, seek refuge there’. And the poor, and the slaves, and those who were most in danger went to *Habasha*. That was the first *hijra*. But the Quraysh only became more hateful, and they tortured the Muslims, and continued to torture them until finally the Prophet had a dream. A city with date palms called *Yathrib*. And so, all the Muslims, in groups, travelled to *Yathrib*, leaving their homes and their wealth, just to live freely and worship God.

Except one of the *sahaba*, he didn't travel to *Yathrib* to escape persecution. In fact, he travelled to *Yathrib* for a woman he had proposed to, who he had fallen in love with, and intended to marry. And though he travelled with the *sahaba* and those who left their wealth and their homes, he was not counted amongst them. That is why the Prophet says:

‘Actions are by intentions, and everyone will get what was intended. Whoever migrates with an intention for God and his Messenger, then his migration will be for God and his Messenger. And whoever migrates for a worldly gain, or to marry a woman, then his migration will be for the sake of whatever he migrated for’.

We must be wary of our intentions brothers.”

I felt much like the *sahaba* in the story. On a parallel path and on a parallel journey, separate and distinct because my differing intentions. I started the research process feeling like a member of the congregation, but as I turned my ethnographic eye towards the congregation, I increasingly viewed myself as distinct. I was sharing in the same actions as the congregation, engaging in the same activities, but with a different intention. As I increasingly communicated my intentions as a researcher, I noted times where I was dealt with as an “outsider”. Subtle as it was, being “invited” to



an event was the first in a series of shifts in which I was recast as an outsider. Hitherto, I wouldn't have expected to be invited, my presence either assumed or having been requested to help. Being invited as a "researcher" was a new experience, and one which meant my identity as a mosque "regular" was no longer applicable. As I stressed my presence in the field as a researcher, research participants naturally took that as my primary identity, rather than the insider status of belonging I held at the beginning of the research. The ethnographic journey I embarked on was one that would change my own identity, beginning as a relaxed "native" but morphing into an agitated and uncomfortable "alien".

### ***Leaving the Field***

The impact of the research on my relationships and status within the mosque meant that by the end of the research process, I was keen to leave the field. I decided I needed a "palate cleanser" in the form of a period of absence from the mosque. I hoped after this I could re-enter and reform relationships and my status to something I was more comfortable with. For six months following the completion of my fieldwork I ceased attending Jamia Masjid except for when it was unavoidable. I chose to attend worship at other local mosques, and did not join in the social activities that would take place at Jamia Masjid. Leaving the field is often discussed in terms of ensuring the impact on research participants is considered, but in my case, I needed to consider the impact of the research process on myself and my pre-existing relationships. Whereas gaining access was a conceptual process, as I already had access to the physical location, leaving the field was both a physical and conceptual action, one necessary to extricate my "ethnographic self" (Coffey 1999) from the mosque, and to re-establish myself as belonging to the mosque.

### ***Beyond Insider-Outsider***

What I have been keen to stress is that being an "insider" or "outsider" is a dynamic process, related to several aspects of one's identity. Much of the insider-outsider debate is phrased around ethnicity or gender, for example, the implications of a white researcher studying a black community. Traditionally, it was "assumed that the researcher was either an insider or an outsider and that each status carried with it certain advantages and disadvantages" (Merriam et al. 2001, 405). This approach crystallises identity, making it both essentialised and static. Haw summarises many of the critiques of this approach, arguing that: -

"Research which relied on the structures of, for example, gender, race and class as analytical tools without acknowledging fragmentation and the fluid and shifting nature of categories such as these failed to theorise adequately at how these categories overlap and intertwine." (Haw 1996, 320)

In the course of my research, I was an insider in terms of my religious affiliation to those who worshipped at the mosque, but could equally be reconstructed as an outsider in attending events that did not match strongly my identity. My experiences are not singular, James Banks proposes a typology of insider-outsider relations, arguing that the researcher could be an “indigenous-insider”, an “indigenous-outsider”, an “external-insider”, or an “external-outsider” (1998, 8). My objection to Banks’ typology is that it is too static and fails to capture the nuance of fieldwork realities. I could apply all four of his categories to myself relative to different parts of Jamia Masjid’s congregation, or at different points during the fieldwork. Banks also links insider-outsider status strongly to knowledge of values and beliefs, while in my own experience it was relationships which were more significant in shaping one’s status. One could perpetually add categories and sub-categories to Banks’ typology, but never quite describe the nuances involved. Human relations are, to use a metaphor, analogue - not digital. I am in agreement with Archer who writes that “conceptualizations of identities as shifting, multiple and crosscutting boundaries and interests... mean that it is impossible to match researchers/participants exactly in all criteria” (2002, 111). Abbas summarises this, stating that “there are, therefore, in any social research context, numerous relations between the researcher and the researched: there is no hegemonic form of ‘otherness’” (Abbas 2010, 125). In short – it is quite rare, if not impossible, that a researcher can ever be totally an “insider” or totally an “outsider”. Even within a bounded research site like that of the mosque, I could move between insider and outsider depending on where I was and what I was doing. Likewise, throughout my extended period of research my status changed from insider to outsider in some contexts (and vice versa).

Though insider and outsider remain useful terms in providing a shorthand way of referring to different approaches to ethnography, they fall short of offering a valuable description of the research experience. Positionality is an alternative and arguably a more capable term to describe the nuances of human relationships than “insider-outsider”. Positionality “emerged from feminist, poststructuralist and postcolonial traditions that sought to challenge the methodological hegemony of neopositivist empiricism” (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert 2008, 533). Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert consider positionality as that “which frames social and professional relationships in the research field”, for example, with regard to “race, nationality, class, religion, caste, or sexuality” (2008, 553). Positionality provides a way to consider how I can be an insider in terms of religion and class, for example, but an outsider in terms of race and language. It recognises too how one’s status or position can change, and as such, is my preferred term for describing and conceptualising my relationship to my research participants.

### ***Navigating the Landscape***

The mosque is not a uniform space, in which I had access at all times to all places. Rather, my identity was tied to where I was expected to be, and what I was expected to do. In undertaking my ethnographic journey, the path I chose to take is not arbitrary. Some of these decisions relate to the boundaries of the field, others relate to where I was guided to and away from. Assuming the mantle of the researcher with strangers in the mosque was relatively straightforward. Conversely, trying to be a researcher in areas in which there exist strong pre-existing relationships, and thus a variety of other expectations, provide an emotional and personal challenge. Coffey considers the very real emotional impact of ethnographic fieldwork in *The Ethnographic Self* (1999). Drawing on her experiences of conducting an ethnography, she considers the way in which relationships formed in the field can lead to intense difficulties: -

“Many field researchers have written autobiographical accounts of the friendship, commitment and love that they found in the field; and where that has diminished, of feelings of hurt, betrayal and guilt. For any of us who have developed friendships in the field, or experienced the consequent demise of such a friendship, the idea that somehow that friendship was ‘false’ and only ‘good’ for the collection of data is clearly abhorrent.” (Coffey 1999, 55)

My own experience raised many of the same questions around the status of relationships in the field, but unlike Coffey and perhaps other researchers, my difficulty was not a product of forming relationships in the field, but rather, of introducing an ethnographic element to pre-existing relationships. It was the reverse of Coffey’s dilemma.

The following conversation took place in November 2014, and presents an example of the difficulty of being a researcher where I was also a friend. I was attending the *aqiqah* ceremony of a close friend’s twin babies. The mosque was also simultaneously hosting a public meeting for United Against Fascism, and a meeting of the Outreach Committee. I came to the *aqiqah* last, at which there was food being served.

I take a pre-packaged carton of food and sit down on the floor next to Ihsaan. I struggle to find enough space to sit comfortably and I sit down sandwiched between Ihsaan and a stranger. The top floor hall of the mosque is hosting the *aqiqah*. There are about a hundred people present, almost all of them now sitting and talking to each other, creating a friendly ambience. Many of these people are invited guests of Ihsaan and his family, others are members of the congregation who know they are welcome to the

food, even without asking. The United Against Fascism meeting is now finished, and the attendees are sitting together and eating.

“This smells amazing,” I tell Ihsaan.

“Take some home too, give it to your parents,” Ihsaan instructs. He organised the *aqiqah* for the birth of his twin sons, and is already eating. He is seated next to his father, who unlike everyone else present, is sat on a chair instead of the floor.

“Congratulations on becoming a grandfather uncle,” I tell Ihsaan’s father.

“Don’t call me that!” he jokes back. “How are you *beta*? How are your studies?”

“*Alhamdulillah*,” I responded.

“How’d your research go?” Ihsaan asks. I had told him I would be late to the *aqiqah* to attend the other events at the mosque. I had justified it to him as important for me to attend to conduct research.

“It’s going okay. I just wanted to be there at the meetings for a bit.” I explain.

“Well you can relax and switch off now, enjoy the food,” Ihsaan quipped.

“I don’t really get to switch off. Even now,” I responded.

“Come on, you’re at my *aqiqah*, don’t do any work” was Ihsaan’s retort.

Ihsaan was more informed about my research at the mosque than most. Whereas others in the mosque sometimes struggled to understand the nature of my research, devoid as it was of surveys, recording devices or any other strategies that would be more commonly associated with “research”, I had told Ihsaan in detail about the nature of participant observation and what it included. He understood that I could be doing “normal” activities in the mosque, which later would form part of my fieldnotes. His instruction to me to “switch off” raises the tension between my various self-hoods and my ethnographic self. My relationship with Ihsaan forms a friendship that predates the

fieldwork, but upon starting my research, at certain points, a new element was inserted into the relationship – that of researcher. His presumption that my research had concluded (“how’d your research go?”) was a reoccurring theme within my engagements in the mosque. Many felt that while I was researching other aspects of Jamia Masjid, other meetings, and other social interactions, I was not a researcher when I interacted with *them*. The research was always “somewhere else” in their understanding. This was true whether I was sitting with friends during an *aqiqah* or wedding, or attending a meeting or present at a *halaqa*. This expectation would often result in me feeling duplicitous. My attendance at a mosque activity was always genuine, but to explain that it was also part of my research could sometimes undermine the encounter. Likewise, by researching at Ihsaan’s *aqiqah* I was undermining his role as host by “working”. In navigating the ethnographic landscape, I needed to be conscious and particularly careful in researching the parts of the mosque which included friends and my closest relationships. The introduction of an ethnographic self into these relationships, rather than being easier, turned out to be the most difficult.

By contrast, there were several activities and events in which those present were aware of my ethnographic intentions. These were activities which I would not normally have attended both in terms of my personal history with the mosque, as well as in terms of my identity. For example, when I attended the Urdu or Arabic *halaqa*, it was clear to all present that this was an activity not usually intended for the British-born Bangladeshi with nominal Arabic and virtually no Urdu, and so my identity made it clear that I was here, primarily, as a researcher. If ethnography is a journey then, the decisions I took on where to research within the mosque had consequences on the clarity of my intentions and how I was interpreted. The mosque was not a homogenous space in which I was uniformly an “insider”. In retrospect, it was the spaces in which I was regarded as a nominal outsider in which the relationships and research process was more easily negotiated.

### ***Embodied Perspective***

My identity is embodied, and my account of the mosque is an embodied perspective, as all ethnographies are. The same ethnography, conducted by someone of a different identity, would no doubt yield a very different account. This isn’t to submit to an absolute postmodern scepticism of “reality”, but instead a recognition that an ethnography is a partial truth. My account of Jamia Masjid which follows in Section Three is a male perspective. The space inside Jamia Masjid is gendered. There is a men’s section, and a women’s section, though the precise physical locations of each are fluid and change. For specific events, women may be allocated the larger first floor hall along with the second-floor rooms. For other events, gendered distinctions may cease entirely and women occupy the space with men (for example, certain *halaqas*, the mosque open days and events such as a charity fundraiser). As a man, I operated within the spaces allocated for males. The

everyday activities of the women's space were largely cut off from my view and observation, and women were only included in my ethnography when the boundaries were lifted. The gendered division of space is an important part of the mosque's structure. It is most keenly observed during times of worship, becoming less significant during social or community activities. The segregation in Jamia Masjid is rhythmic, agreeing with Goffman's view that gender segregation has a "sort of with-then-apart rhythm, with a period of the sexes being immersed together followed by a short period of separation, and so on" (1977, 316). Jamia Masjid had its own rhythms of separation and immersion of genders, one which in general followed timings of the prayers. During the course of my research, the "women's section" (as it was called) was largely on the periphery. I interviewed and interacted with women involved in the mosque but casual participant observation of the women's section was not possible. In one regard, this makes my experience of the mosque partial. However, it is worth noting that all the congregants are subject to this partiality. They operate within the confines and expectations of the space and none can transcend them. Any and every experience of the mosque is gendered.

Of course, my identity as a British-born South Asian Muslim can be embodied in other ways, which in turn predicates the way I form relationships with those in the field, and how they perceived me. McLoughlin writes how, by using the word "Muslim", he gained an immediate response from the "loud and proud" minority, but failed to get a response "from the 'silent majority' whose religious identity was routinely 'ethnic' and relatively unconscious" (McLoughlin 2000, 188). Even within a mosque, a primarily religious site, congregants attend for a variety of reasons, and I needed to be conscious of how I presented myself, the questions I asked and the presumptions I made about the congregants. The salient point is, as Silverman notes, that "how people describe things and how they reason about them are pragmatic selections from a range of possibilities...imagine the difference in being approached to speak as a 'mother of three' and being approached to speak as 'a professor'" (Silverman 2004, 164). Within the field, I could call upon my multiple identities and selfhoods in ways that the research participants would respond and react to differently. Do I present myself as a member of the "*shabaab*", an academic, a South Asian, a Bangladeshi, a Muslim, a *Hanafi*? These identities provided with me with both resources and challenges.

Yet I would be sceptical of considering the embodied aspects of my identity as being determining of research encounters. Sanghera, when interviewing Muslims, had an "insider" narrative built to include him as an "Asian" but which recognised he was Sikh. The respondents, by using phrases such as "as an Asian", and Panjabi phrases meaning "our people" and "our lot" (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert 2008, 556) included the researcher as an insider and chose not to highlight a religious identity that would have made him an outsider. In short, an Asian identity was

augmented in the interview data due to the Asian identity of the researcher but, more than that, the respondents utilised their Asian identity to create rapport with a stranger. Bolognani describes a similar process by which interview respondents responded to various identities and cues to establish relationships with her, ranging from her Christian faith, to her status as an immigrant, to her passion for Bollywood (Bolognani 2007, 286). It seems that in many ways, the identity of the researcher is sometimes peripheral when trying to form rapport with research participants. If successful, the research participant and researcher find some common ground by which to establish a shared understanding. If unsuccessful, there are certainly countless ways a researcher can be cast as an outsider by the research participant. Identities and pre-existing relationships provide a resource to use and little more than that. Identities should not be treated as predictive of whether or not rapport can be established.

In summary, using the metaphor of the ethnographic journey, not only is the landscape navigated by one's identity, but it is in fact created, dictated and shaped by the identity of the researcher. This is not to argue that there is a "false" account and a "true" account. Angrosino and de Pérez contend: -

"[T]he ethnographer may need to realize that what he or she observes is conditioned by who he or she is, and that different ethnographers — equally well trained and well versed in theory and method but of different gender, race or age — might well stimulate a very different set of interactions, and hence a different set of observations leading to a different set of conclusions." (Angrosino and de Pérez 2000, 689)

My various citations of researchers and their experiences are to simply stress two points. The first is that identities and self-hoods of the researcher do not preclude inclusion or exclusion. The insider/outsider dichotomy, if taken too literally, can hide the work and investment any researcher must do to establish trust, rapport and a productive research relationship. Second, the identity of the researcher can prompt unique and different responses. This is an unavoidable consequence of conducting qualitative research. Rather than trying to prevent or mitigate it – as if there is a true account and a false account - I believe it simply requires recognition. My account of the mosque is *my* account – tied to my identity, biography and personal decisions. So, what is coherent about ethnography? Could anyone write anything about Jamia Masjid mosque, and contend it is accurate? Much like two journeys undertaken by two different people, each would be unique, but there are orientating landmarks, periods of synchronicity, and shared observations that tie two different journeys together.

### ***Summarising the Ethnographic Journey***

In the introduction of this chapter, I argued that there was value in discussing ethnography as a journey. The metaphor was inspired by Haw's reflections on researching the educational experiences of Muslim girls, where she concludes: -

“The question becomes not *whether* the white researcher or any other researcher, white, black, old, young, should stay at home, since they are all involved in a journey anyway, but *how* the journey be undertaken” (Haw 1996, 325).

My attempt here is to heed Haw's advice, and be conscious of *how* I undertook my ethnographic journey, and present those choices to the reader. In considering the ethnography in this way, I reflected on my choices in how I began the journey (negotiating access), what I brought with me (my cultural capital and identity), where I was coming from (my pre-existing relationships with the mosque), the choices I made (bound and otherwise) in navigating that landscape of my ethnography, the way in which my perspective was embodied and thus how the landscape was shaped by my identity, the impact of the journey from beginning to end on myself and the research participants, and how I left the field. The metaphor allows me to articulate reflexively my research experience, allowing the reader an insight into my research and hopefully a means by which to assess the value of my findings. It also allows me to underline the way in which traditional insider-outsider methodologies fail to describe the research experience authentically, which I argue can be messy and convoluted, and transcend simplistic categorisation. This chapter provides an appropriate segue into the ethnography section of my thesis. Having described my practice and choices, the reader is prepared to be introduced to Jamia Masjid and my research proper.



### **Section Three – The Ethnography**

## **Chapter Six – God’s House**

### ***Introduction to Section Three***

Jamia Masjid is a rich, diverse, complicated and messy place. In writing an ethnography of the mosque, my task is to convey to the reader a coherent account of it. I must convey the intensity of prayer, the collegiality of social times, the tension in conflict. This is the task I embark upon in the subsequent four chapters. As an ethnography, the reader will be introduced to extended ethnographic descriptions, which are accompanied by commentary. The ethnographic sections are indicated through indentations that mark them out from the rest of the text in the chapter. Some analysis will be presented in the ethnographic chapters themselves, some analysis will be foreshadowed or signposted, but the most significant theoretical work is reserved until Chapter Ten. I deem this strategy of separating the ethnography and theoretical analysis to be the most successful way of presenting my fieldwork experiences, as alternative strategies undermined both the ethnography and the analysis. I will allow the reader the final judgement on the success of the chosen strategy, but assure them that the decision was taken with careful consideration and deliberation. In Chapter Six, I describe the mosque, its congregants and its defining features, and reveal how the congregants play an active role in shaping the function of Jamia Masjid. In Chapter Seven, I look at how rhythms and time operate in the construction of sacred space. In Chapter Eight, I look more closely at the way in which prayer and etiquette (*salah* and *adab*) serve to mark out the mosque as a perpetual site of blessing, or space of *baraka*. In Chapter Nine, I examine how the sacredness of the mosque is contested, believing that contestation is not just a disturbance of sacred space but a way of constructing it. Taken together, the four ethnography chapters provide an insight into the everyday of a Welsh mosque, the people who make it what it is, and the religious practice it is home to.

### ***Introduction to Chapter Six***

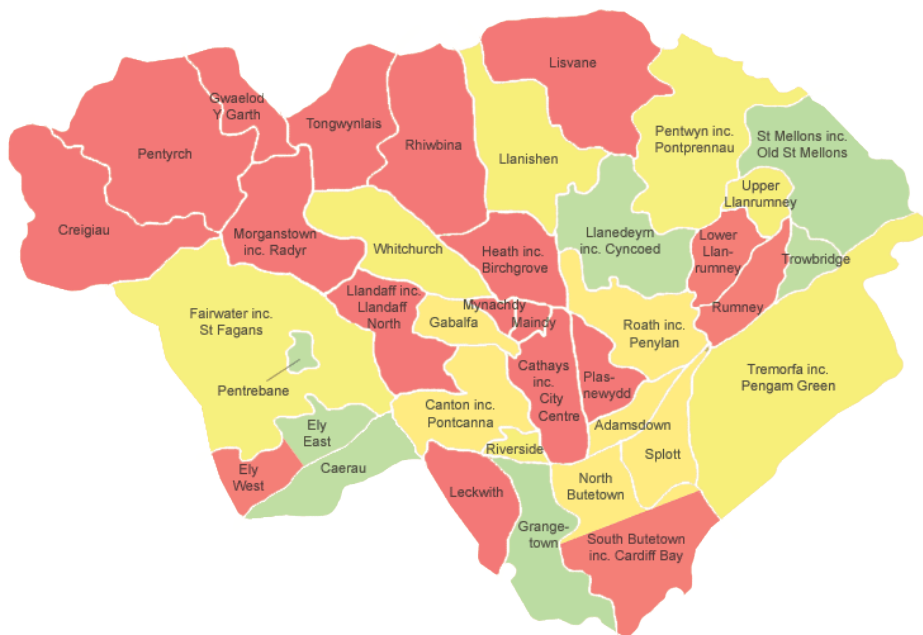
In this chapter I offer an extended and extensive description of Jamia Masjid, one which describes the mosque’s defining features, - that is, its youthfulness, its ecumenism and its multipurpose function, which I describe as interspatial. I do this for two reasons. The first reason is that it provides the necessary orientating information for the reader to ensure they can engage with subsequent chapters unfettered by introductory information. The reader will in this chapter glean data about the mosque, its history, origins, physical proportions, congregation, and activities such that they will have a familiarity, albeit basic, with Jamia Masjid. The second reason is to ensure that as an ethnographer, I have delivered an account of the mosque which has integrity. In my subsequent chapters, I describe only one strand of activity of Jamia Masjid, namely, the activity of making sacred space. These descriptions are drawn from my 344 days of active fieldwork, spread over a year and

one month, which in total numerates to well over a thousand hours. I reduced my fieldwork experience down to 220,000 words of notes, 624 images, two large binders of hand drawn sketches and scribbles, and 82 hours of audio recordings. After analysing and abstracting this corpus of notes, I condensed them into four ethnography chapters. This redaction is not only an intellectual challenge, but also raises anxieties about the extent to which I have given an account of the mosque that my research participants would consider “honest” and “true”. Would the congregants of Jamia Masjid recognise the mosque as I have described it? This chapter attempts to ensure that they would, and so in addition to providing orientating information, it also hopes to provide the reader with a sense of the mosque as a whole, in all its richness, diversity, complexity and messiness and thus for me, as the writer and researcher, alleviate slightly the concerns of failing to do justice to the experience of ethnography. It is necessary to say that what follows is a generalised description, a broad-brush overview to give the “big picture” of the mosque. It adopts a different style than subsequent analytic chapters which draw from fieldwork incidents much more intimately. As with all general accounts, the details are sometimes overlooked so as to see the forest in favour of the trees. The later chapters however will introduce the specificities, the details, and the “flesh and blood Muslims” (Varisco 2005, 29).

### ***The Dragon and the Crescent***

Cardiff is a port city, nestled on the southern coast of Wales. North of it lies a handful of small towns before reaching the rugged expanse of the Brecon Beacons National Park. To the west is the Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend, Port Talbot, and Swansea – towns and cities that like Cardiff are tied to Britain’s industrial and colonial past. To the east of it, across the Severn Estuary (and a much-bemoaned toll, at least on the way back across) is Bristol, and the rest of England. The M4, running in almost a straight line directly east, connects Cardiff to London. Cardiff, for a Welsh city, is largely flat, especially in comparison to Swansea or Bangor. Instead, the city is surrounded by hills (though people tend towards calling them mountains), visible on the horizon from most parts of Cardiff. The city has a gentle slope towards the bay. The wealthy outer suburbs of Cardiff (Cyncoed, Whitchurch, Llandaff North) give way to the cosmopolitan residential areas of Roath, Adamsdown, and Canton, where one is more likely to encounter ethnic diversity, council homes, and deprivation which rub alongside gentrification of various forms. The centre of Cardiff is sandwiched by Cathays to the north and Cardiff Bay to the south. It is the former of these two, Cathays, in which Jamia Masjid is located.

Figure 3



Source: Cardiff Housing 2016

The latter, Cardiff Bay, is central to the presence of Muslims in Wales as it was Cardiff's docks that attracted Wales' first Muslims; travelling itinerant seaman, or lascars, who worked in the shipping industry. The docks, which shipped iron and then coal to a burgeoning British Empire brought a windfall of wealth to South Wales (BBC News 2003). New institutions were built, land redeveloped, and Cardiff itself expanded and grew from a small town into Wales' capital, chosen as such relatively recently in 1951 (Rees 1969). Adopting a capital was a significant step in Wales' developing sense of nationhood, as was a referendum in favour of devolution in 1997. Since then, Wales has established the National Assembly, located in Cardiff Bay. In the years between 1951 and 1997, Wales underwent dramatic economic change. Coastal cities felt the loss of the shipping industry, Cardiff and Swansea in particular. The Valleys also faced crises with the closure of mines. The general economic slump has however shown signs of recovery. Cardiff has since reinvented itself as a cosmopolitan capital, investing significant amounts in redeveloping Cardiff Bay from a shipping port into a tourist hotspot and centre for creative industries and government. The redevelopment itself has been controversial, since it largely left the Butetown area untouched, creating a stark juxtaposition of wealth and poverty. It is Butetown which houses the historic Muslim communities of Cardiff who trace their heritage back to Yemen and Somalia. These Muslims are often into their third, and sometimes fourth, generations, but largely still live in deprivation (Lee 2007). Historically, the area was called Tiger Bay, a colloquial name given to the Docks area. The early lascars had

settled, married locally and formed families, and founded Cardiff's first mosques and Muslim institutions in the Docks area itself (Ansari 2004; Halliday 2010). The adjacent Riverside and Grangetown areas are home to migrants also, but these are largely post-war and South Asian in character. Unlike migration to London and the north of England, Cardiff's South Asian migrants did not enter manufacturing. Rather, they entered the service industry during the 60s and 70s, establishing restaurants and takeaways, or working as taxi drivers. These migrants slowly moved into more suburban areas, shifting Muslims from the centre to the suburbs of Roath and Cyncoed. A third moment of Muslim migration to Cardiff took the shape of students. Cardiff University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, and the University of South Wales attract international students to the city. Most live in Cathays, Cardiff's de facto student area. Some settle in Cardiff after graduating, either in Cathays or nearby. This varied migration history also leads to a rough class division (which is perhaps more imagined than reflected in reality) of the working-class Muslims on the south side of the River Taff, and the middle-class Muslims on the north side.

### ***Cardiff's Mosques***

Cardiff has seventeen mosques. Some are historic, such as those in the Docks area, and were established in the first half of the twentieth century to serve the itinerant seamen settling and stopping in Cardiff on their trade. The bulk however were opened from the 1970s onwards, with the second wave of Muslim migrants from South Asia. A handful opened more recently in the last decade, but largely the custom has been to extend existing mosques with renovations or purchase of adjacent properties to meet the new demands of a growing Muslim population (Cardiff's Muslim population stands at 23,656 according to the 2011 census, up from just over 11,000 according to the 2001 census). Of Cardiff's seventeen mosques, only two are purpose-built and Jamia Masjid is not one of them. From the remaining mosques, four are converted churches or chapels, one is a converted community centre, and eight are converted houses. The final two are categories of their own. One is in a semi-permanent modular building, so not purpose-built, but not renovated either, and finally Jamia Masjid, which is a converted parish hall. The architectural diversity of the mosques is second to the theological diversity. Two mosques are Shia Twelver in orientation, and the rest belong to Sunni denominations. Five belong to the Deobandi tradition, two to the Barelwi, and two to the Bangladeshi Fultoli school. The remaining mosques are associated either with the Salafi movement, or else Middle-Eastern Sufi schools. The theological orientation of mosques shouldn't be overstated, and Jamia Masjid's approach will be explored in further depth later in this chapter. The size of mosque congregations in Cardiff varies from a hundred to about three thousand, Jamia Masjid is among the larger mosques in terms of both physical size and congregation.

### ***Studentsville***

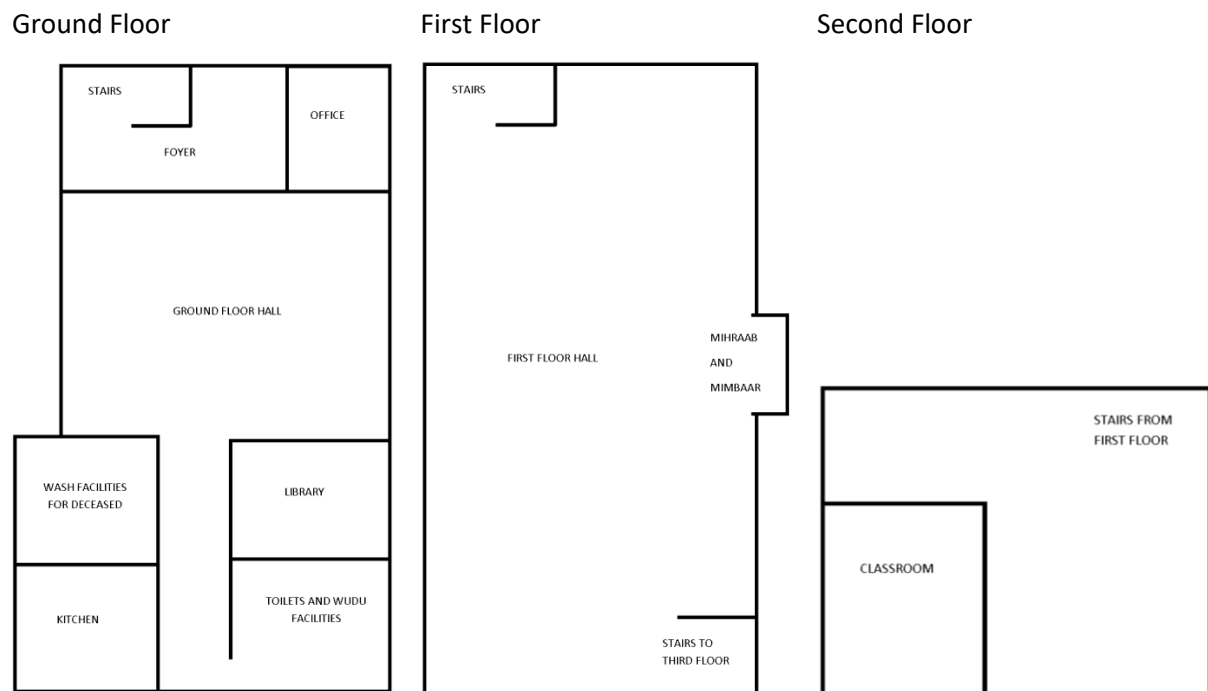
An approach towards Jamia Masjid from any direction would take one past several eras of terraced homes, the earliest dating back to the late Victorian era, and the most recent, merely a few years old. Most have all the outward signs of being occupied by students, such as a lettings board on the front, several wheelie bins to a single house, and a generally unkempt front garden. The bottom front window of each home is often covered either by posters, or at the very least, netting, to afford some privacy to the occupants for whom the room is a bedroom rather than a living room. Close to Jamia Masjid are a few semi-commercial roads. Again, the student character of the area is immediately apparent. There are over a dozen estate agents, two late night kebab shops, a Tesco Metro directly opposite a convenience store, and four lunchtime sandwich shops. A closer inspection would also reveal something else about the nature of the area; there are two halal butchers, two Asian food stores, a Polski Sklep, and an oriental foods store. These shops reveal the multicultural and multireligious makeup of the area. They partly cater to the student population, which is diverse and international, as well as the population of Muslims visiting the area from outside due to the mosque. During the summer months, Cathays becomes a “ghost town”, but during term time, it is vibrant and energetic. On Friday, Saturday and Wednesday nights crowds of students are visible walking to clubs and pubs. During weekdays, there is a constant flow of pedestrian traffic in the area as students walk from home to the university and back again. The area in which Jamia Masjid is located includes three popular cafes, five takeaways, two pubs, and two nightclubs which all attract student crowds. Not far from the mosque is Cathays train station, heavily used by students and university staff. The student character of the area means Cathays is sometimes referred to as “Studentsville” by residents and Cardiffians alike. There are still, however, considerable numbers of young professionals, working class families, and recent migrants who also call Cathays their home. The area hosts several other mosques too. As well as Jamia Masjid, there is al-Azhar Mosque (a short 200 metres away), Hazrat Siddique Mosque, Quba Mosque and the Iman Centre. These five mosques are located all within a mile of each other. Muslims walking to the mosque for prayers and parking their cars in the limited spaces available is a regular sight, as are the throngs of people emerging from the mosques after Friday prayers. Studentsville is a busy, vibrant, and cosmopolitan part of Cardiff.

### ***The Mosque***

Jamia Masjid itself would not immediately catch the attention of a passer-by as a significant building. It blends into the row of terraced homes in between which it is located. It is constructed out of the same red brick of the houses that flank it. The sign on the front would be the only indication that this is a place of worship, and the large size of the building would only be revealed from outside if one

was to stop and observe congregants leaving the site, streaming out in much greater numbers than a building of its apparent size should be able to cater for. The entrance to the mosque is a large wooden set of double doors that lead into a small foyer. In total, the mosque has three floors. The ground floor, accessed via the foyer, is used as a multipurpose hall. The first-floor hall is the largest, and usually reserved for the communal prayers. The second-floor hall is smaller than the other two, but still sizeable, and is usually reserved as a prayer space for women.

*Figure 4*



Apart from the foyer, toilets and kitchen, the entire mosque is covered in a rich thick red carpet. The building itself was a former parish hall, purchased by Muslims in 1989. The original plans submitted for the parish hall date it to 1910 (and a Scouts Hall located immediately behind it, to 1915), and the physical building was constructed in 1916. It spans two streets, penetrating deeper than the terraced homes on its flank, explaining its deceptively large size. The building was renovated in 2008, adding the two new floors. The second floor does not cover the entire span of the building and is not visible from the front, and thus from the street view it is no higher than the houses adjacent. At the back of the mosque is a Scouts Hall. It was built to accommodate the original church's scouting group, and is still maintained primarily for the Muslim Scouts group, but also acts as an overflow area and multipurpose space.

There are precious few official documents relating to the mosque's purchase and establishment, and several versions of the story behind its inception are told by the congregants. The basics are largely agreed upon. A group of students from Cardiff University decided to establish

a mosque near the campus. They fundraised and purchased a parish hall which had been on the property market for several years. The founders were a mixture of both Middle-Eastern Muslim students, working class Muslims who lived locally (largely from a Pakistani background), and Muslim taxi drivers desiring a location close to the city centre of Cardiff in which they could pray. The founders of Jamia Masjid, and its early congregation, would previously pray either in the nearby al-Azhar Mosque (still operating as a mosque now, and only a few hundred metres away from Jamia Masjid), Hazrat Siddique Mosque, or the now defunct Canton Mosque. The role of Canton Mosque in the founding of Jamia Masjid is debated. Some members of the congregation told me it was instrumental, such as Sami Faisal:

“Canton Mosque burned down just before Jamia Masjid opened. It used to be a lot like Jamia Masjid. Really open, really welcoming, you could do whatever you wanted there. And some of the trustees from Canton Mosque heard about the students trying to buy Jamia Masjid. And they came along and said, here is some of the money from Canton Mosque, we’ll join you, and we’ll do it together. And they passed on the ethos of Canton Mosque to Jamia Masjid. The rest of the members of Canton Mosque went and founded Quba Mosque, and well, you know what happened”.

Quba Mosque, about a mile away from Jamia Masjid, has been mired in controversy over the legal disputes between trustees for the past several years. Not all agreed that Canton Mosque was so important in Jamia Masjid’s founding. “We had already gathered most of the money, and the trustees [of Quba Mosque] were willing to work with us, and they had no mosque of their own, so they said, ‘why not?’” Saeed Intishaar tells me, one of the imams and leading figures of Jamia Masjid. Since its inception as a mosque, many of the founders of Jamia Masjid moved away, either returning to their home country or pursuing careers elsewhere in Britain. It is not uncommon to have them return, and be introduced to the congregation by Saeed as one of “old leaders of Jamia Masjid”, and share their own, usually idiosyncratic, account of the establishment of the mosque.

Jamia Masjid, is a converted parish hall. As such, it was used as overflow space for two local churches, and has the architectural features of a community hall rather than a church. The mosque was used with few changes for nearly two decades, 1989 until 2008, when it was closed for renovation. The renovation added additional floors, nearly doubling the mosque’s capacity, but few other significant changes were made except for the inclusion of the *mihrab*. The *mihrab* is oriented towards the *qibla*, which faces the left of the building as one enters. The *qibla* is the direction of prayer, towards Makkah, from Britain. The first floor of the mosque is the largest hall. Like the rest



of the mosque, it has plain beige walls, clean apart from the scribbles and marks left on the walls on any area within reach of a toddler. There is no decoration adorning the walls, or calligraphy like one can find in other mosques. Instead, there are a handful of noticeboards with posters for upcoming events and regular activities. There is also a large frame with seven clocks contained within it, of which only one is active. The remaining six clocks tell the congregants the time for each of the five congregational prayers, and the Friday *Jummah*. The mosque management will update them regularly so as to be accurate. Attached to the bottom floor is the Library, accessed through a single door at the far end of the hall. The library is a medium sized room, lined with books, with a table in the middle and a photocopier stored away in the corner. There are countless stacks of leaflets, stacks of chairs, and other miscellaneous goods for which the library unavoidably becomes a storeroom.

The remaining facilities in Jamia Masjid are practical, including a kitchen with a clean tiled floor and metal plating on the walls. The kitchen is commercial, it has a ceiling with large extractor fans, and only a single window on the far end. Several large gas canisters, each only slightly shorter than an adult person, are connected to metal stoves that are arranged on the floor. Along one of the walls, big metal pots are stacked, too large to cater for anything but a group of hundreds. Indeed, the kitchen is regularly used for just that. In Ramadan, it will cook daily for hundreds of congregants who gather at sunset to break their fast in the mosque. Outside of Ramadan, it produces food to sell as quick-lunches on a Friday. It will occasionally be used for wedding catering and other festivities, such as an *aqiqah* or for the eid party. There is a room next to the kitchen that is usually locked. It is a ritual washroom, used for preparing a dead body for burial. Jamia Masjid is only one of three mosques in Cardiff that have such facilities, an essential part of the funeral rites for a deceased Muslim. At the end of the corridor are the *wudu* facilities, which include the toilets. The floor is coated in a rough anti-slip paint, and is almost permanently covered in a thin layer of water due to its regular use. There are flip flops available for users to wear as they enter the room. There is also a disabled access toilet and a shower room. Separate from the main mosque building is a Scouts Hall and, as mentioned earlier, it was built by the previous owners. It has continued serving the same purpose but instead housing a Muslim Scouts group, providing a historic continuity to the building.

### ***The Shuyookh, the Committee, the People***

Thus far, I have concerned myself with describing Wales, the city of Cardiff, the history of the Muslim presence, and the physical mosque and its establishment. Only from the periphery have I introduced the various individuals who are part of Jamia Masjid, who make it a living, breathing institution, and who collectively might be referred to as the “mosque”. In Christian use, a church can refer to the building or the people who worship there. This is not the same when speaking of the

*masjid*, which translated means “a place of prostration” and has a focus on the use of the place. The anglicised “mosque” is slightly messier. It is sometimes used in the same way as “church” and so might refer to a body of believers, perhaps as an indirect influence of the usage of “church”. In the same vein, I have come across the occasional use of the phrase “mosque and state”, akin to “church and state”, in which the mosque becomes a metonym for Islam and Muslims in Britain. Within Jamia Masjid itself, “the mosque” consists of three distinct groups. The “*shuyookh*”, the “committee”, and finally the “people”.

The *shuyookh* are the religious leadership. In another mosque, they might be referred to as the “imams”, the “*maulvis*”, or the “*mullahs*”. The term *shuyookh* is Arabic, and its use reflects the Arabic speaking demographic of Jamia Masjid. Jamia Masjid has two part-time imams, Shaykh Talha and Imam Faraz. Imam Faraz is the eldest, and has been associated with the mosque for the longest. He is of a Pakistani background, and received his religious instruction in a *madrassa* in Pakistan. Shaykh Talha is younger, and was recruited from his native Egypt to serve as the mosque’s imam in 2003, with a view of serving the younger congregants. He received his Islamic education in the form of a BA in Islamic Studies, alongside considerable study with a teacher in his native Egypt. Both Shaykh Talha and Imam Faraz have responsibilities for leading the prayers, which are split between them, and for delivering a series of educational classes. Imam Faraz and Shaykh Talha share responsibility for the Quran School, which educates children on the basics of the faith and recitation of the Quran in Arabic. Individually, Shaykh Talha delivers *halaqas* aimed at the youth as well as classes on *tajweed*, the melodic art of Quranic recitation, in which Shaykh Talha is qualified. Imam Faraz by contrast focuses on classes for the older Pakistani congregation, delivering *halaqas* in Urdu, as well Quran reading classes for adults. Saeed Intishaar is often referred to as part of the “*shuyookh*”, but he also is part of the committee. He is well-read in Islamic theology and often takes a role leading *halaqa* or delivering occasional lectures and Friday sermons. Included amongst the *shuyookh* are various visiting and itinerant scholars who also preach, teach, and lead prayers at Jamia Masjid.

Alongside the *Shuyookh* is the committee, who form the managerial and administrative leadership. The mosque’s committee is tiered. There are three trustees, established when the mosque registered for charitable status in 2009. They are three individuals with a long-standing association with the mosque – Saeed Intishaar is one, Uthman Yusr is the second, and Hussain Akbar the third. A second tier of management comes from individuals who are, confusingly, referred to as “the committee” but indicate a wider membership of twelve individuals with various and sometimes poorly defined roles. This “committee” predates the formal establishment of the trustees. They oversee the “Mosque Manager”, who is employed to run the mosque on a day-to-day basis. The

Mosque Manager, and his volunteers, forms the final tier of the mosque leadership. At the beginning of my fieldwork, a new Mosque Manager was appointed, Dr Haqqani. He instituted several changes, including the inclusion of a “Delivery Team” to assist him, who facilitate the hitherto ad hoc sub-committees of the mosque. The Mosque Manager, Delivery Team and the various sub-committees make up about two dozen individuals upon whom the regular activities of Jamia Masjid rest. So, while Jamia Masjid has a formal committee (the trustees, its wider membership of twelve, the Mosque Manager and his volunteers) the term “committee” will be used to refer to the entire scope from trustees to the Delivery Team, or even a single part of it. Finally, there is the congregation; those who worship at the mosque regularly or irregularly; those for whom the mosque has been set up to serve - the “people”. These three agents are the primary actors who collectively are described by research participants as “the mosque”. It is the latter, the congregants, to which I devote the bulk of my attention as an area which has largely been untouched by existing literature.

### ***The Congregation***

The term “congregational studies” in the United Kingdom is used to describe a body of scholarship that focuses on Christian churches (Guest et al. 2004). It provides an interesting counter-point to British Muslim studies. In Chapter Ten, I discuss what Muslim congregational studies might look like. For now, however, I intend to justify my use of the term “congregation” to describe the Muslim worshippers at a mosque, conscious that it presents several challenges, but also in the belief that it is the most apt term one can employ. I use congregation in its simplest meaning of a group gathered together. There are some similarities between the etymological root of the word congregation and the Arabic word *jamaa* which refers to the group assembled for prayer, from which *Jummah* is derived, the name of the Friday prayer (as well as the name of “Friday” itself in Arabic). Indeed, some translate the term *al-Jummah* as “The Day of The Congregation”<sup>3</sup>. Thus, there is some linguistic equivalence between the Arabic and the English to mean that “congregation” is more than just a loan word from Christian theology.

The size of the congregation of Jamia Masjid is hard to number precisely. The visiting worshippers would not be expected to register their membership with the mosque. The Friday prayer accommodates just over a thousand people. City Hall is sometimes booked for the eid prayers for which over three thousand people attend. When City Hall is not available, the eid prayer is conducted twice, sometimes thrice, within Jamia Masjid to accommodate the number of people in attendance. From this, it isn’t unreasonable to conclude that between two and three thousand people visit the mosque for worship. Belonging is fluid, and indeed Jamia Masjid has never

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Abdel-Haleem’s 2005 Oxford University Press edition of the Quran translates Chapter 62 of the Quran, *al-Jummah*, as ‘The Day of the Congregation’.

attempted to make it more concrete. Aleena, a young woman, once complained as to why Jamia Masjid could not run the mosque on a “subscription” basis, alluding to other mosques who employ a similar system. She made her complaint in a committee meeting about funding for the mosque, an ever-present problem. Ihsaan wasn’t keen on the idea - “some people would subscribe, some wouldn’t, and you’d have this division between people in the mosque, some lording it over others.” This is one of several comments that indicate an egalitarian ethos was important to some members of the mosque congregation.

This isn’t to suggest there are no divisions amongst the congregation. Those who attend the mosque consistently are termed “regulars”, a loose definition that covers a few hundred people. Being described as a “regular” is a subjective and dynamic process. How does one become a regular? There is no guidebook or strict criteria, but the following things help; be at the mosque as often as possible, take an active part in its activities beyond the daily prayers, and form personal relationships with the imams and other regulars. Once the status is acquired, it is rarely lost despite infrequent visits. An individual might have moved to another city, only visiting Jamia Masjid once or twice a year, but still be afforded the honour of being described as a regular. Irregulars also exist in practice, though not in name. An irregular may belong more firmly to other mosque congregations, but worship at Jamia Masjid when it is more convenient than going to their usual mosque. Others, such as the “Friday Muslims” as they are sometimes disparagingly called, only attend once a week, fulfilling what they consider to be the most important duty – the *Jummah* prayer. There are also those, such as passing travellers, who may only visit the mosque once in their lifetime. I use the term congregation to refer to all these people.

Within the mosque, the congregation is often referred to as “the people” by the mosque management, and sometimes “the brothers” or “the sisters”. The congregation itself is incredibly varied, and its variety is a source of pride for several members of the mosque who believe it reflects a more authentic practice of Islam which should be, in their view, egalitarian and ecumenical. It is mentioned copiously in my interview notes as their reason for choosing to attend the mosque. The congregation draws its membership from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, though with a larger proportion of Middle Eastern and Pakistani ethnicities than others. The linguistic variety that follows the ethnic variety is negotiated by use of English as the *lingua franca*. A good proportion (my best estimate is about two thirds) of the congregation are British-born, and are attracted, among other things, to the mosque’s use of English. The ethnic diversity of the mosque’s founding members, I am told, meant English was chosen as the primary language from inception). Jamia Masjid is sometimes characterised as a “middle-class mosque”. The term can almost be an insult, but it is also a description used by members of the mosque itself, though rarely, and usually only to make a point.

“Of course, the politicians prefer to visit us, we’re middle-class, they find it more familiar, and they don’t have to face questions about council cuts” was mosque-regular Jameel’s assessment of a political visit that coincided with the European Parliament elections. An audit by the Welsh Government on Welsh Muslims indicated that they are more likely to be in high level employment than the Welsh average, as well as being more likely to be in long term unemployment or low-waged jobs than the Welsh average (Lee 2007), and indication of a significant gap between poorer and wealthier Muslims. Jamia Masjid is a representation of the higher end of this spectrum, but it would be wrong to overlook that the mosque’s membership includes a significant proportion of working-class Muslims too. Its middle-class character is a consequence of its student population during its earliest stage of inception, who progressed onto professional careers but retained their connection to Jamia Masjid, and sometimes even travel significant distances from elsewhere in Cardiff to attend.

Geographically, only a small majority of the congregation are local and within walking distance of the mosque. The bulk of these are the transient student population in Cathays, and a few “regulars” who live nearby. The mosque also has a young population. The mosque refers to the young male regulars as the “*shabaab*”, an Arabic term meaning “the boys”. There are also the mosque “uncles”, although this is a term not used in the same way as “*shabaab*”. “Uncles” refers to the elderly population of the mosque, usually retired men, who are caricatured as spending the bulk of their day time in the mosque sitting and talking in the corner in between prayer times. Unlike the term *shabaab*, which is a description of youthful energy and positive masculinity, the term “mosque uncle” has few positive connotations. The grumpier and more disapproving the attitude of an elderly Muslim man, the more likely he’ll be called a “mosque uncle” with a certain tone and look. Jamia Masjid is also one of nine mosques in Cardiff that have space for women. Much like the male congregation, the women also have a loose group of young female regulars, though no term equivalent to *shabaab* is used to describe them. There are also women who hold religious authority. Some of these women might be described as an *alima* (a graduate of a *madrassa*, usually a Deobandi *dar ul-uloom*) or else *ustada* (teacher). The female religious leadership hold positions on the committee, but they are not placed in the same category as *shuyookh*, a term reserved for the men. This diverse and loose group then forms the congregation of Jamia Masjid. Their agency within the mosque are recurrent themes in the following chapters, but also of this chapter, in which I intend to demonstrate how the congregation “make” Jamia Masjid.

### **Muslim Ecumenism**

A question that many fellow academics in religious studies would ask me during my fieldwork is “what denomination does Jamia Masjid belong to?” I decided to try and answer this question by taking the perspective of a “newcomer”, trying to see the mosque with fresh eyes. And so, on a

summer evening, I sit in the mosque, notepad on my lap, observing the prayer hall as people gather for the *asr* prayer. It's a bright day, warm, and sunshine streams through the high windows. I am posing myself the question "how do I know the *madhab* of this mosque?" *Madhab* in Arabic refers to the jurisprudential schools of thought within Islamic theology, and is often used colloquially to refer to wider denominational differences between Muslims. It is challenging to identify any indications of denomination within Jamia Masjid. The daily prayer is similar amongst Muslims. A trained eye could make an educated guess as to which *madhab* a praying Muslim might belong to but it would be from some banal details such as where they placed their hands (hands near the navel during prayer is usually a giveaway the person belongs to the *Hanafi madhab*). Mosque architecture and design are not telling either, and often reflect cultural heritage and personal taste rather than doctrinal differences as they might between a Catholic and Protestant church. A further challenge is introduced through Jamia Masjid's diversity. There are some individuals dressed in white thobes and their heads covered in skull caps. This might indicate a religious conservatism, the type associated with Salafis or perhaps Deobandis. Yet not far behind these people is someone dressed in jeans and a Futurama t-shirt with the protagonist pictured on the front, something a conservative Muslim would not consider appropriate to the prayer (and for some, the depiction of a human being on the t-shirt would be sufficient to invalidate the prayer entirely). This diversity of opinion amongst the congregation is common. The more I sit and observe, the more I note that whether consciously or otherwise, very little in Jamia Masjid communicates theology, *madhab*, or any sectarian exclusivity. A person can communicate sectarian belonging or identity through their dress, speech and behaviour, but the mosque itself reflects little of this. This may be an attempt to cater for the religious diversity of their congregation or it may be the reason for the religious diversity. It does not mean however that the mosque's congregation lacks a religious flavour altogether. The flavour reflects the background of the mosque leadership and those worshippers that attend who though diverse, still tend towards certain significant religious groups. In the following part of this chapter, I discuss such issues under the banner of theology. My preference for this word to describe the religious affiliations of congregants is perhaps a result of my own undergraduate degree in religious and theological studies. Theology has no fixed equivalent in a Muslim context, which I consider advantageous. It is an ambiguous term which I use precisely for its fuzziness and lack of consensus. Within this thesis, it refers to the contested religious issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxis, the wide discursive space in which Muslim research participants in the mosque introduced, discussed, debated and shared religion.

The defining attribute of Jamia Masjid is a form of Muslim ecumenism. Its greatest concern is unity, intrareligious cooperation, and the inherent validity of the totality of Sunni Islam. The

denominational diversity of Muslims is of relevance here. Gilliat-Ray offers a description of the various reform movements found amongst British Muslims in her introductory work *Muslims in Britain* (2010b). It offers a useful means of understanding the theological landscape of British Muslims. Likewise, Hamid explores activist Islam in Britain, identifying old and new trends of diversity (2016). A journalistic and less scholarly description of British Muslim diversity is offered by Bowen who explores the key activist and quietist Muslim groups in Britain today (2014). The Muslim denominational landscape is a landscape in flux, and this is true of Jamia Masjid especially, where a wide breadth of the religious diversity of British Muslims can be found, yet is possible to discern certain prominent traditions. The mosque worshippers and attendees tend to be from a Muslim Brotherhood and *Jamate Islami* background, something reflected strongly in the mosque leadership as well as the national organisations to which the mosque is affiliated. Both groups share common ground in their theological outlook despite originating from two different continents. They are politically activist and reformist, belonging to what is sometimes termed the “Islamic movement” (Peter and Ortega 2014). Their scholarship is also not confined within the four *madhahib*, though they stress the legitimacy of the *madhahib* more than Salafi or Ahle Hadith reformist counterparts.

The global links and religious roots of the mosque should not be over-emphasised however. In day-to-day practice, the local and particular needs of the mosque, coupled with the very particular negotiations of theology tend to be more influential in determining the religious flavour of the mosque. Likewise, as both Geaves (1996) and Gilliat-Ray (2010b) indicate, reform movements from the Middle East and from South Asia can change dramatically, especially in new contexts such as Britain. The origins of a reform movement associated with a mosque can only tell us a limited amount about how a mosque or religious institution in Britain might operate. Jamia Masjid is representative of a chapter of theological innovation in the United Kingdom that will no doubt take researchers several more years to fully map. The development of these movements in Britain is a story in and of itself, and one which is still unfolding. Jamia Masjid is one part of that unfolding narrative. What the *Jamate Islami* and Muslim Brotherhood have given Jamia Masjid are two primary qualities. The first is its emphasis on unity. The *Jamate Islami* and the Muslim Brotherhood both see Islam not only as a religion in a personalised sense, but as a nation or community. The strength and vitality of this community relies on cooperation, and thus the unity of the *ummah* is of paramount importance. The second quality is a forward-facing activism. The *Jamate Islami* and the Muslim Brotherhood both call for engagement with wider society and are comfortable in working with governments and politicians. The significance of this attribute can only be understood in relation to quietist Muslim groups, such as some Salafis or Deobandis, who view political authority with heavy scepticism.

Jamia Masjid's concern for unity and desire for activism lead it to function as a religious chameleon, taking on the characteristics of its congregation in ways that might be frowned upon in other mosques. So, the mosque has wavered towards Salafi practices at times, simply because Salafi members of the congregation took part in organising a series of events. Likewise, the mosque has hosted Sufi speakers, again simply as a consequence of the committee members involved in decision making. In the early period of my fieldwork, a series of lectures were organised by the mosque management under the title of "Scholarly Discourses". The lectures took place on Monday evenings, with four scholars being allocated a Monday slot and rotating as the series went on. The organisers consciously invited scholars from four different backgrounds to promote religious "unity". The approach of stressing unity is the predominant attitude of the committee in decision making. If something could lead to disunity, then it is to be avoided. If something promotes unity, it is inherently virtuous. That said, some members of the mosque's leadership are highly critical of Sufism. When Jamia Masjid does engage with Sufism, it tends to be with "sober" Sufis, those who stress orthodoxy and distance themselves from idiosyncratic Sufi forms of worship. This largely unspoken "red line" of the mosque has been a source of contention for many of the regulars and the *shabaab*, some of whom embrace Sufism with more enthusiasm than others. The other arena within the mosque in which theology manifests is in decisions related to prayer. The observation of eight or twenty *rakah* for the Ramadan *tarawih* prayers is one example. The *Hanafi madhab*, particularly the South Asian Deobandi variety, is committed to twenty *rakah*. The *Shafi madhab* and Salafi traditions are committed to the position of eight. For many years, Jamia Masjid performed twenty cycles of prayer. The Shafi and Salafi members of the congregation left after eight cycles, leaving those who wished to pray twenty to continue alone. Since 2010 however, including the two Ramadans during which I conducted my ethnography, the mosque opted for eight *rakah*. This decision was largely influenced by pragmatism – Ramadan during this period fell close to the summer solstice, and as the *tarawih* prayers are conducted after sunset, this can mean prayers start as late as 11pm. Performing eight *rakah* allows worshippers to return home and to bed sooner. This practical method of accommodating religious diversity is typical of Jamia Masjid. Jamia Masjid's religious flavour is a composite, a mixture of the congregation's views and the committee's, balanced with the day-to-day practicalities of worship. This ecumenism is often utilitarian, rather than dogmatic, taking advantage of a wide breadth of available Islamic theological positions to achieve practical benefits. Thus, the mosque's origins can be traced to Pakistan's *Jamate Islami* and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, but it has moved to accommodate a much wider religious diversity.

The ecumenical tone of Jamia Masjid is in many ways a recognition of the shifting sands of British Muslim demographics. The changing age profile of British Muslims has consequences for



theological practice. Sami Faisal, a Scout Leader and senior member of the *shabaab*, tells me the following in an interview: -

“Our uncles’ mosques, the mosques of yesterday, they were like Old Men’s Clubs. You did your ten-hour shift at the takeaway or the chippy or in the taxi, then you go to the mosque. The people are the same as you, they speak the same language, sometimes they’re even from the same village. And you feel safe. There’s no racism. You don’t need to struggle trying to speak English. You don’t need to prove you’re British enough, I mean they were working in the days of Tebbit and Combat 18, maybe not as bad as today, but pretty bad still, especially because they didn’t have the leaders and skills we have to speak back to racists. And they can just finally chill, relax. I understand it, I really do. But now, it’s different. Different pressures, different needs, different people. Jamia Masjid isn’t for our uncles, God bless them and everything, but it’s for the youth. It needs to speak English. It needs to be open, not ‘my way or the highway’, and it needs to drop the ethnic and cultural stuff from back home, and pick up the ethnic and cultural stuff of here in the UK. I don’t mean Sunday Roasts, but football, and Scouts, and that kind of stuff”.

Regardless of the accuracy of Sami’s account of the history of mosque establishments, the framing of Jamia Masjid as a mosque catered towards a new generation’s needs is a significant part of Jamia Masjid’s self-identity. Put another way, Jamia Masjid’s ecumenical approach is not simply ecumenism for ecumenism’s sake, but is part of a desire to be relevant to the changing demographics of British Muslims. The defining characteristics of Jamia Masjid’s congregation are its ethnic and religious diversity and its youthfulness. These are embedded and intertwined with Jamia Masjid’s ecumenical approach.

### ***A Place of Prostration***

At the centre of Muslim worship, and indeed any mosque, is the ritual prayer, the *salah*. This is indicated by the Arabic word for mosque, *masjid*, which as described earlier, refers to a place of prostration. Salah takes place five times a day, as any student of Religious Education in Britain will be taught. The prayers are determined by the sun’s ascent and descent through the sky. *Fajr*, the first prayer, takes place at dawn. *Dhur* occurs just following the midday zenith. *Asr* takes place during the sun’s descent, *maghrib* immediately following the sunset, and *isha* begins once twilight ends. The figure below illustrates these prayer times (taken from Sarwar (1982)).

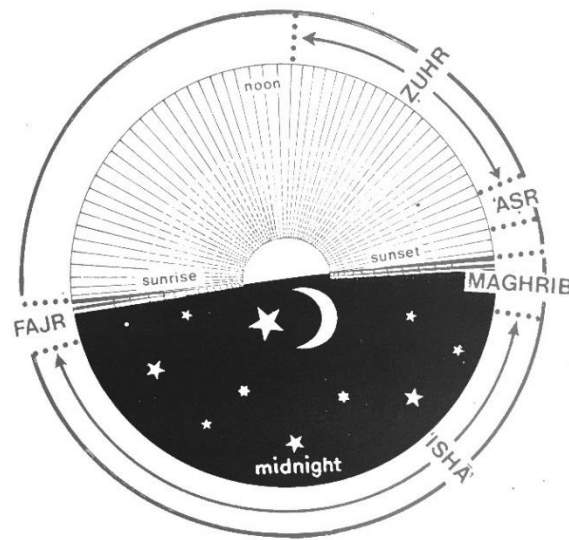


Figure 5

In Britain, located as it is on extreme northern latitude, the timings of these prayers vary significantly throughout the year. In the winter, the first will be around 7am, and the last, 6pm. During summer, the first can begin as early as 2.30am and the last at 11pm (see Ali 2014 for an overview of these variations, and the theological issues it raises).

Given this variety, the character of the congregational prayer which takes place in Jamia Masjid can equally vary. The winter months attract a large number of professionals for the *fajr* prayer who attend the mosque just prior to work. During the summer, the long evenings encourage many to visit the mosque for more than one prayer, perhaps staying from *asr* at 7pm until *maghrib* at 9pm. A published timetable provides worshippers with details of when the imam will lead the prayer. Each prayer occurs within a window of time in which that prayer can be completed. As such, the timetable is essential for knowing these parameters. In a pre-modern mosque, worshippers would be informed of when to pray by the *adhan* (call to prayer) made by the *mu'addhin*, which could be heard in the local area. The industrial revolution, modernity, and subsequent changes to employment, transport, and the development of urban environments all mean that traditional method is no longer viable, especially in Britain where, unlike a Muslim-majority country, few allowances exist to incorporate the daily prayers into a working schedule. The prayers form a central part of the Jamia Masjid around which other activities take place, and so the rhythm of the prayers dictates the flow of people in and out of the mosque.

The prayer itself follows a similar pattern at every occurrence. First, a call to prayer is made by the *mu'addhin*, broadcast throughout the mosque through speakers. The congregation then line up in rows behind the imam, who stands at the front. The imam begins the prayer with "*allahu*

*akbar*". A recitation by the imam follows. *Surah al-Fatihah*, the opening chapter of the Quran, is always recited. This might be done audibly, with a soft melodic recitation, or otherwise recited silently, depending on the prayer in question. If it is daytime (*dhur*, *asr*), it is read quietly. If it is night time (*maghrib*, *isha*, *fajr*), it is read aloud. The imam will lead his congregation in bowing, and then prostrating, *sujuood*, from which the term *masjid* takes its name. The prayer is completed after two, three or four cycles of the same actions with the imam turning to the left and right, and saying "*asalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah*", a greeting to the angels present during the prayer. This simple but formalised worship punctuates an observant Muslim's day. It is ideally done in the mosque, but can be done elsewhere also. I will return to it at several points in the following chapters, providing greater description and outlining in greater depth its significance, particularly to sacred space making. The prayer is the most important reason for the mosque's establishment. Every activity falls around the prayer, it gathers people together into the mosque - sometimes half a dozen, sometimes hundreds, fulfilling the description of the mosque as a "place of prostration".

### ***Beyond The Prayer***

Central as the prayer is to Jamia Masjid, it is only one of many activities and projects the mosque runs. During the period of my ethnography I recorded 882 events that took place in the mosque beyond the daily prayer. This number would be an undercount of a complete list (no such list exists), due to the events that took place without my knowledge (an occurrence that though rare, still happened from time to time) and an inability to observe the women's section of the mosque completely. Many of these activities are regularly occurring activities, such as the children's Quran School every weekday, or the Friday evening *halaqas*. Others might be one off events for which the mosque has been booked, such as weddings, *aqiqahs*, a lecture tour or social gathering. They also include events that take place outside of the mosque, but are organised by members of the mosque for the congregation, such as "Thursday Night Football" or family BBQ at a nearby park. Here I provide a brief overview of the nature of these events.

The list that follows may be overwhelming and disorientating. To some extent, this is an unavoidable result of the sheer breadth of the mosque's activities, but it also reflects the way in which the congregants themselves would experience Jamia Masjid's activities. A worshipper at Jamia Masjid may attend educational classes, social meets, rites of passage, visits by politicians, interfaith sessions, outreach events, charitable projects and so on, in a way that lacks any particular coherence. Jamia Masjid is truly a "multipurpose" mosque, however it is more accurate to describe not just as "multipurpose", but as an interspatial mosque. The mosque's self-conceived purpose is to meet the demand and needs of its congregation in relation to, and in respect of, existing services. It "fills the gaps" of needs and services available to the congregation. The term "interspatial" is

preferable to “multipurpose” as it does more to show the dynamic mechanism and intention behind the mosque transforming from a space largely reserved for prayer and religious rites to a place in which diverse activities are found. It also serves to highlight the continuity between the mosques first established in Britain and mosques like Jamia Masjid today. In Chapter Two, I surveyed how a striking theme in the literature on mosques established in Britain was that they were set up to meet the needs of Muslims in diaspora. Jamia Masjid is different only in that it is meeting new needs in new ways. The following *hadith* is included in the mosque’s mission statement draft (a document in flux, which was yet to be agreed upon at the end of fieldwork):

“The best of people are those that bring most benefit to the rest of mankind.”  
(Daraqutni)

Being “of benefit”, and providing utility is a guiding principle of the mosque’s activities and use of space, and is perhaps the only coherent narrative which runs through the otherwise disparate and sometimes sporadic events of Jamia Masjid which will be surveyed next.

The mosque’s events fall into several categories, led by ad-hoc committees or dedicated volunteers. The **education** activities are the most organised, with a specific committee dedicated to overseeing them. The mosque holds a daily Quran School, sometimes referred to as the *madrassa*, which provides children between the ages of six and around sixteen instruction in reading and reciting the Quran, peppered with occasional classes on how to pray, fast, and moral teachings. There are also a range of *halaqas*. These are small groups undertaking religious education from a single teacher. The mosque holds a youth *halaqa* on Friday evenings, led by Shaykh Talha. In addition, there is an Arabic language *halaqa*, an Urdu *halaqa*, a Malay *halaqa*, and occasionally a Bengali *halaqa*. There are also several *halaqas* that run for a few weeks on specific topics, such as a *Tajweed Halaqa* which focused on correct Quranic recitation, or a *halaqa* on the rites of Hajj for those intending to make the pilgrimage to Makkah. Alongside Islamic education, GCSE and A-Level tuition is also offered on Saturday mornings between 10am and 1pm on core subjects such as Science and Maths. The goal for Dr Haqqani, the Mosque Manager, was not to have a comprehensive offering of *halaqas*, but simply ones which met the needs and requirements of the congregation. If the service and support could be accessed elsewhere, such as another mosque, then Dr Haqqani felt it was not a priority.

Not all activities are led by the mosque management. Many, indeed perhaps the bulk of activities, are proposed and led by the congregation or external organisations. The mosque can be described as a subaltern counter-public (Fraser 1992) in this sense, a space accessed, used and taken

advantage of by Muslims as a semi-public sphere. Fraser (1992) used the term subaltern counter-public to describe a variety of spaces in which minority groups find and express agency. The semi “public” nature of the space was even stressed by Saeed Intishaar in the Friday *khutba*, calling on congregants to think of the mosque as a “coffee shop” – a place of social and intellectual meeting (the idea of the subaltern counter-public and “coffee shop” mosque is analysed more fully in Chapter Ten). This call does not fall on deaf ears, as it is the activities organised by the congregation which are perhaps the most dynamic of Jamia Masjid’s projects. These activities can be described as **social, charitable, political** or related to **physical well-being** and often, they are a combination of several.

Social activities are common. The widescreen televisions used during *Jummah* prayer to broadcast the imam’s sermons throughout the mosque are often appropriated for games console competitions. During the World Cup and other major football tournaments, the televisions are also used to watch matches. Two table tennis tables folded away in the corner of the mosque are regularly used for tournaments arranged on the weekend. Additionally, three parties are held after each eid, a “brothers’ party”, a “sisters’ party”, and a “children’s party”. Other social events might be organised solely for the purpose of fostering opportunities to create new friendships between congregants, such as quiz nights, board game evenings, and tea and coffee mornings. The mosque hosts regular fundraising activities led by national charities such as Islamic Relief (a British-based international relief charity with a strong presence in Cardiff). An example might be a lecture by a popular preacher, followed by a call for donations. Similar events are held by Human Appeal, Muslim Aid, Interpal, and Syria Relief. In addition to the events which are led by the charities, there are opportunities for the charities to visit and fundraise during a regular mosque activity. Every Friday after *Jummah* prayers there is a charitable collection and once or twice a month it will be solely for Jamia Masjid’s running costs. The remaining collections are offered to charities, but competition for these slots is intense and bookings must be made months in advance. Every evening in Ramadan, during the *tarawih* prayers, there is another opportunity to donate. A representative from a charity will go to the *mimbar*, inform the congregation of their charity and the work they do, and ask for donations as buckets are passed between congregants and spare change as well as cash notes are placed inside. The last ten nights of Ramadan are the most in demand by charities, since it is during this period that the reward for righteous actions are multiplied, and therefore, greater amounts of money are donated for these collections. Many Muslims also pay their *zakah*, a pillar of Islam, during this period, and so charities vie with one another to attract donors. A survey by charity website JustGiving found that Muslims are Britain’s most charitable givers (Gledhill 2013), and research by Islamic Relief (Pudelek 2013) indicates over £100 million is raised by British Muslims in Ramadan

alone. Regular charitable giving is woven into the fabric of the Jamia Masjid's activities, and this helps to demonstrate how such significant funds are raised by British Muslims nationally.

As for political events, politicians regularly make use of the gathered congregations of the mosque. During the period of ethnography, political candidates addressed the mosque congregation after Friday prayers in the run up to the European Union elections. Other political visits are attempts at "public engagement" by politicians and include holding open meetings with Muslims at the mosque on issues ranging from parking to organ donation. Jamia Masjid generally has an open-door policy to politicians, viewing such visits as a civic duty and a key way of empowering its Muslim congregation. Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Plaid Cymru politicians all visited Jamia Masjid at some point during my fieldwork (the only party absent, perhaps understandably, was Ukip). The mosque also hosted meetings from external groups. United Against Fascism, Citizens Cardiff and similar organisations sometimes requested use of the library for meetings. A local campaign to "Stop UKIP" also held their inaugural meeting in Jamia Masjid's library, considering the location particularly symbolic of their vision and aims.

Sporting activities within or organised through the mosque are common. On Monday evenings, the bottom floor of the mosque is transformed into a makeshift gym for boxercise classes for adult men. The same happens on Saturday evenings for young children. The mosque has a football team that plays in the local league. A second football team consisting of the "Jamia Masjid Rejects", as they are jovially called, play more informally on Thursday evening. There are also well-attended one-off football tournaments, as well as the occasional booking of an entire leisure centre for gender segregated activities (allowing Muslims with conservative mores to participate). In a similar vein, Saturday nights would also see a group excursion to a local swimming pool for their "men only" hour. It was previously organised through the mosque by booking out the entire pool, but after several years the pool simplified the process for the mosque by officially making it a "men only" period. Women's only fitness classes in the mosque, including yoga, Pilates, and Zumba are organised from time to time, but rarely with any regularity. There is an ethos of what can be described as "muscular Islam" at Jamia Masjid, comparable to "muscular Christianity" (see Hall 2006). Being physically fit and active are woven into the mosque's activities and teachings.

**Rites of passage** also constituted a significant proportion of the mosque's events. After the birth of a child, Islamic teachings instruct the parents to celebrate with a communal feast – the *aqiqah*. Many opt to host the feast at the mosque, inviting friends and family as well as strangers to celebrate the birth of the child together. Weddings and funerals also dotted the calendar of the mosque. Funeral prayers often brought the largest numbers into the mosque. **Outreach** events, in which members of other faiths visited the mosque, occurred several times a month. These included

primary school visits, visits from Scouts groups, and visits from churches. They were sometimes organised haphazardly, and at other times were the product of several months of planning. Jamia Masjid's "Outreach Team" made a distinction between *dawah*, the propagation of Islam, and their own activities, which they described as "bridge-building". The nearby al-Azhar Mosque regularly held *dawah* events in the form of street preaching and information tables, and so Jamia Masjid's Outreach Team decided consciously to focus more on their own distinctive efforts, which acted as correctives to "misconceptions" about Islam, in their view. This was believed by some to be a category of activity distinct from *dawah*, but the distinction was contested. Others argued anything that advanced understanding of Islam was *dawah*, regardless of whether it was done with the explicit intention of attracting converts. The important point however is that Jamia Masjid consciously locates itself in a wider network of mosques and mosque activities, and seeks to provide its own unique contribution. The mosque is also home to a **Muslim Scouts** group. A Scouts Hall at the back of the building provided a space for the activities. Cubs, Beavers, Explorers and Scouts groups took place on most weekday evenings, along with the associated events of Jamborees, Scouts Olympics, and visits from other Scouts groups. Finally, there are those activities which do not easily fit into a category. For example, a workshop on Islamophobia by the national anti-Muslim hate monitoring charity TELL MAMA, or a one-off day course organised by the educational charity al-Buruj, a fundraising bazaar organised by the Scouts group, or a visit by a Quran reciter from *Masjid al-Haram* in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. In between all this activity, a person may visit the mosque for moments of quiet reflection, or to seek out social company – knowing that "something is always happening." In other instances, groups of friends might arrange to meet at the mosque prior to going to watch a film or a meal at a restaurant.

The purpose of the above description is to stress the diverse ways in which congregants use and visit the mosque, the range of activities that take place, and the intersection between the congregation and the mosque management. The categories of educational, social, charitable, political, physical well-being, rites of passage, outreach and the Scouts are used only to give a sense of order to what is diverse and varied. The activities of the mosque not only resist easy categorisation but are rarely attempted to be categorised at all. Most are comfortable with the "messiness" of the activities. The mosque management have attempted to create a coherency in terms of the processes by which an event is organised (leading to the creation of the Delivery Team), but have never attempted to categorise or define their activities into different spheres - what happens at the mosque is simply what happens at the mosque. Important to note is that of the events described, only a few are led by the management. The rest are simply facilitated by them. The use of the mosque is thus structured by two things. The first is the vision of an interspatial

mosque which provides for the needs of its congregation. The second is the mosque as a subaltern counter-public, accessed and utilised by ordinary Muslims, politicians and civil society groups.

One can also organise the mosque's activities in three tiers. I use the terms *fard*, *fard kifayah*, and *mustahab* to describe these. These are Islamic jurisprudential terms, and generally would be given by a Muslim scholar skilled in legal pronouncements (*mufti*) in the form of a *fatwa*. I use them not in the jurisprudential sense, but in a sociological – to describe how the mosque management and congregation envisage the role and function of the mosque, and how they themselves classed their actions. The first is the core of the mosque, the *fard*, or the compulsory. The core constituents of this category are the five daily prayers. It is the function of the mosque without which, there is no mosque. The second tier is the *fard kifayah*, the communal responsibilities, which are largely the rites of passage and the educational activities. These are those specific religious obligations which, rather than falling on the individual, fall on the community to fulfil as a social whole. The *janaza* prayer is one such example, it is not the family of the deceased who are responsible for organising this but all Muslims. In jurisprudence, if a *fard kifayah* is fulfilled by anyone, then all are absolved of its responsibility. If it is left undone, then all are blameworthy. The mosque becomes a key mechanism by which such communal responsibilities can be completed. Beyond that, the third tier is the interspatial, a *mustahab* action which the mosque *shuyookh* would describe as “fulfilling the *sunnah*”. *Sunnah* means the example of the Prophet Muhammad, and *mustahab* is a legal classification of an action being “recommended” but not compulsory – essentially these are actions within the spirit and ethos of Islamic teaching. In common parlance, when describing the Islamic jurisprudential classification of an action, *sunnah* and *mustahab* are interchangeable terms. The *mustahab* activities of Jamia Masjid are considered beneficial, provide a utility and meet an identified need, yet are not fundamental to the mosque's functioning. I adopt the emic language of the congregants to underline that the mosque's activities can't be easily divided into the secular and the religious – since overtly religious or otherwise, all the activities are conceptualised within a paradigm of actions which are religious encouraged. It is this third tier, the *sunnah*, which is interspatial. The activities which constitute the interspatial are a combination unique to Jamia Masjid itself, and it is dynamic and changing, responding to the local context. Even within the period of fieldwork, some activities ceased (the monthly “Health” lectures) and others started (weekly Arabic classes). These constantly shifting sands are captured by the term “interspatial mosque”, which provides us an insight into the way that the mosque's activities respond to changing needs and changing climates. It also allows us to consider how other mosques are utilising the same model, but with different results. Mufti Sulamaan is the imam of a small “house mosque” in the Grangetown area of Cardiff. “I can't do the same as Jamia Masjid or the



Welsh Islamic Centre in my mosque. We do the *namaaz* and the *madrasa*, that's all we can do, but that is what's needed in Grangetown, we even have too many kids in our *madrasa* to be honest". The comments came in a conversation at a Cardiff imam's meeting, after one keen committee member from Jamia Masjid began espousing the range of activities Jamia Masjid did. The response, though perhaps motivated by a spark of defensiveness, provide some insight as to how mosques conceptualise their role in society. The interspatial mosque can be a place like Jamia Masjid, with Scouts, Quran classes, and boxercise sessions. It can also be a small converted terraced home that runs significantly fewer activities, but still seeks to meet the needs of its community.

### **Summary**

Jamia Masjid is a youthful mosque, an interspatial mosque, and an ecumenical mosque. I describe these characteristics as key consequences of the congregation the mosque serves. The foregrounding of the congregation's agency and role throughout this chapter has been to indicate how they are significant actors in this mosque. As the British Muslim population is undoubtedly weighted towards the youthful end of the spectrum, Jamia Masjid reflects a conscious shift of activity and theology among mosques as spaces serving the needs of this population. Jamia Masjid accommodates young Muslims within its structures of authority, and specifically caters services to their needs. Its ecumenism is also something suited to the religious diversity of British Muslims, and instead of serving a congregation bound by a particular religious grouping or ethnic identity, it seeks to be a mosque for as many as possible. Although the mosque would locate itself within a Sunni orthodoxy (though Shias do worship at Jamia Masjid), it stresses its ecumenism. The role and purpose of Jamia Masjid is interspatial, which is to say that it caters its activities to the needs it identifies amongst its congregation and among a network of other mosques, after having fulfilled the priority *fard* and *fard kifayah* duties. Jamia Masjid achieves its diverse interspatial activities by operating as a subaltern counter-public, a "coffee shop" mosque, in which the congregation are encouraged and able to undertake roles in organising events and services. Taken together, this chapter provides an account of a mosque in a key period of British Muslim development, tracing the impact of changing British Muslim demographics on the religious institution of the mosque. The ideas introduced in this chapter are developed further in Chapter Ten, but in the subsequent three ethnographic chapters, I turn the reader's attention to the primary focus of this thesis, that of sacredness.

## **Chapter Seven – A Day in the Mosque**

### ***Introduction***

“I love seeing the mosque alive” was a passing comment made to me by Ishfaaq, a mosque regular sat next to me as we awaited the beginning of prayer. His sentiments were shared by many others in the congregation who spoke of Jamia Masjid as having more “life” than other mosques. The life of the mosque is easily perceived through the various comings and goings of peoples to the mosque, the diversity of activities that take place, and the varied atmospheres created through them. One could describe this life as the rhythm of the mosque, and it is these rhythms I turn my attention to in this chapter. In the previous chapter I described Jamia Masjid’s activities as diverse and dynamic, claiming the mosque was interspatial in how it positioned itself to meet the needs of the congregants and local community. Here I intend to look more closely at ritual, and in particular, to the ways in which the mosque negotiates its sacredness with its diverse uses.

A single day at the mosque is intersected by several rhythms, creating various types of moments. There are moments of work, of education, of socialising, but most importantly, sacred moments. I argue that the rituals and practices which mark and create sacred space within the mosque don’t just mark places, but also time. This creates a patterned non-homogenous timescape which can be described as rhythmic. This rhythmicity can serve to facilitate mundane activities. Some of these rhythms can be observed in the course of a single day, others are only perceptible over the course of the lives of the mosque’s congregation. The significance of the description in this chapter is to demonstrate how sacred space and time are accomplished, or to phrase it differently, to describe how congregants invest effort towards the creation of sacred moments. Once we account for the temporal, it becomes clear that ritual alone does not make sacred space but rather there is a dialectic process of creation (a theoretical argument I will explore further in Chapter Eight and Chapter Ten). My arguments are primarily three-fold. First, I demonstrate how rhythms structure human activities, and in the case of the mosque, the daily prayers. Next I show the temporal aspects of sacred space, arguing the spatial and temporal are inextricably linked and must be considered in tandem. Third, I show how sacred space is a dynamic process, it can come and go, and should not be considered static or fixed – especially within Jamia Masjid. This dynamism is best expressed as “sacred moments”.

The significance of rhythm in the mosque can be articulated by presenting a snapshot of the mosque on a single evening - a Friday in late spring 2014. It is 10.15pm. The mosque is currently alive with activity. The bottom floor has about two dozen congregants, mostly but not exclusively teenagers. Some play table tennis on one of the two tables set up at one end of the hall. Others are gathered in a corner animatedly playing a game of *Articulate*. Another group sit talking, sharing food,

in this case, fried chicken. The hall is messy, and the atmosphere is loud and boisterous. On the top floor are elderly congregants sitting with their backs to the wall, engaged in their own leisurely conversations. The lights are on in the women's section of the mosque, giving the indication of activity. There are few times more ideal than a Friday evening in which to demonstrate the way in which the mosque is a social space for its congregants. Skip forward a mere twenty minutes, to about 10.35pm on the same night, and the mosque is completely different. All the male congregants are gathered on the top floor, stood in organised rows, facing the *qibla*, hands folded and heads bowed in worship. They are in a reverent silence. There are no conversations. The games downstairs are abandoned. The recitation of the Quran by the imam fills the mosque, the reverb lasts long into the silences that punctuate the verses. The congregants stand, bow, and prostrate. The atmosphere is unmistakably one of worship.

The following questions arise from this snapshot: what prompted this shift in activity? What is the significance of it? I intend to answer these questions in the following chapter, advancing my own contribution to the theory of sacred space, arguing that time is an important dimension of the sacred, and that human activity marks time and space, and orders itself accordingly. Any ritual that marks out space equally marks out time. The significance of the way time is marked is only perceptible across time, and thus a rhythm-conscious analysis is of value, drawing on the ideas outlined by Lefebvre in *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). I demonstrate how the mosque congregation traverses time and I contend that they do so actively. They mark it out, stamp, codify, create, and end it. Just as certain spaces are marked out for recreational use, and certain spaces are marked out for occupational use, time too, is marked and segmented and segregated for varying purposes.

When speaking of how time intersects spatial practice, we can speak of routine. Rhythm however takes us a step further. Rhythm is the culmination of routines, patterns and actions acted out across time repeatedly, it also describes the way in which routines interact with other routines, and how patterns are created unintentionally and unexpectedly. Importantly, all of these are nestled within repetitions or cycles beyond human control – sunrise and sunset, the solar year, the human body and its desire for sleep and sustenance. In Lefebvre's words, "where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm" (2004, 14). It is a survey of place, time and energy which is presented next. What follows is a 24-hour day in the mosque to demonstrate the variety of the timescapes observed by the congregation, the way in which sacred space waxes and wanes, and how rhythm is a constituent part of that process.

### ***A Day in the Mosque***

There were in total eight days during my fieldwork year in which I spent 24 hours (or close to it) in Jamia Masjid. Most of the other days would involve travelling to and back from the mosque for the

various activities I had decided to observe that day. At times, I would make a conscious effort to be at the mosque when something was not happening or to stay in between events and activities and to simply loiter, but it was rare that I could loiter for long in the mosque without being swept up into one activity or another, which would invariably dictate my location within the mosque (and sometimes outside of it). It was thus never possible for me to sit in the corner of the mosque for an entire day, as if an unobserved observer, and to witness passively the activities that took place in front of me. What follows is a composite in which I have tried to give such an account. It is not a day so overly generalised that it could be any day. Rather, it is drawn from a particular Friday in May 2014.

### **Dawn**

Sohail Akhtar has never missed a single morning prayer as long as anyone in the mosque can remember, I am told on more than one occasion. He is retired, and jokes that he doesn't know his own age, but supposes himself to be in his mid-eighties. "We didn't keep records. My parents never thought to write down my birthday. My passport says 1928, but we just guessed." Living up to his reputation, Sohail is in the mosque in the early morning, wrapped up warmly in a scarf and thick winter jacket. *Fajr* prayer is at 3.30am. The mosque doors are opened by Imam Faraz at 3am, the lights for the foyer are switched on and half the lights for the ground floor hall also. No one turns the heating on, the prayer will be over quickly enough. As 3.30am approaches, more worshippers enter the mosque. They are groggy eyed and quiet, almost to the extent of being sombre. Greetings are exchanged in whispers. Imam Faraz and Sohail are joined by several more elderly men. The youngest of the congregation are Mustafa, a mid-twenties British convert, and Nabil, a teenager who attends a local college. All gather on the bottom floor of the mosque. Promptly at 3.30am the *iqama* is given and Imam Faraz leads the prayer. The prayer is two cycles, the first lasting longer than the second. Once it is complete, the bulk of the congregation leave. Those who remain are the older retired men, including Sohail. They sit in the corner and open their Qurans. There are six of them today. Imam Faraz sits with them. Each takes it in turn to recite a page of the Quran. Some read slowly, stopping often and re-reading words. Others read more confidently and with a melody. Sohail struggles. On a previous occasion, he said "I've spent my life working, and never went to school when I was young. I learnt English while working and I taught myself Arabic at night." Once each has read a page, they place their Qurans back on the shelves and with smatterings of conversation, make their way out, switching off the lights and locking the front door as they leave.

The *fajr* prayer which takes place at dawn is at 3.30am in May. But it is not always as such. My fieldnotes record *fajr* prayers as early as 1.30am in the height of summer and as late as 7.30am in winter. Britain's location at a northern latitude means the seasonal changes of the earth's tilt have a dramatic effect on the length of days and the time of dawn. All prayer times are subject to these seasonal changes and the character of the prayers themselves shifts depending on the time of year. 3.30am is one of the most poorly attended times. When the prayer is earlier, one can expect a handful of university students, who arrive clearly having yet to go to bed. In the winter, when the prayer is at 7.30am, it is common to see smartly-dressed office workers attending prayers prior to beginning the work day. The rhythm which dictates prayer times does not operate alone, but is in a relationship with other routines which structure the day, such as work or education. A significant aspect of this is that the time at which *fajr* prayer takes place has an impact on who attends, and by extension, the character of that prayer. Just as a mosque located in a wealthy suburb would attract a different crowd of worshippers than a mosque located in a deprived inner-city, the timing of the prayer attracts different congregants.

The mosque then falls silent after *fajr* prayer, and remains silent for perhaps the longest stretch of the day. From *fajr* until well into mid-morning, no one enters the mosque.

As with any rhythm, silence and pauses enunciate the melody. The mosque falling silent is a combination of many factors, but during weekdays, mornings tend to have the least activity. This is partly due to other preoccupations such as school and employment, but also reflects the absence of any formal prayers during this period. On a weekend, activities such as the GCSE tuition begin as early as 9am, but during a weekday there is rarely any activity again until midday. On Fridays, however, preparations for the *Jumma* prayer begin around mid-morning.

### ***The Jumma***

Dr Abdullah Haqqani opens the mosque up again at 10am. He lives locally, which is convenient given the toing and froing required as part of his job as the Mosque Manager. He fumbles with the keys, holding a large briefcase in one hand, and steps into the foyer, and then immediately heads to the door on the left and opens his office. A large desk occupies the centre of the small room, and a three-person sofa takes up the remaining space. The rest is an organised mess of papers, leaflets, various files, and stacks of books. A large screen in the corner shows the CCTV feed from both inside and outside the mosque. He sits down at his desk and opens a large black A4 diary. "Shaykh

Talha is giving the *khutba* today” he announces to me. Mehdi Pirmohammed, the caretaker, joins us in the office, greeting us before hurriedly setting about to prepare the mosque for the Friday *Jumma* prayer. The *Jumma* is the busiest time of the week for the mosque, and in a few short hours, hundreds of worshippers will be arriving. Mehdi first opens all the doors and windows in the mosque, including the fire exits. On a warm day like this, any breeze will be welcome when the mosque fills up. He heads then to a small cupboard in the corner of the bottom hall, pulls out a Henry Hoover vacuum cleaner, and immediately sets to work.

The women’s section on the second floor is first. He lugs the vacuum cleaner up the two flights of stairs and starts cleaning, before making his way down to the first-floor prayer hall, then the bottom floor and finally the library. Occasionally he will stop vacuuming to pack away some clutter, such as returning a Quran to a bookshelf, or placing a sheaf of paper in a filing cabinet (with no attention given to whether they belonged there or elsewhere). The final room to clean is the toilets and ablution facilities. He tidies the “slippers” (or “flip flops”, depending on who you ask) of which there are a dozen pairs, placing a pair in front of each of the cubicles and the disabled toilet, and leaving the remaining three pairs at the entrance. He ensures the plastic matting on the floor is arranged neatly, then places out rolls of paper towels for worshippers to use to dry themselves after ablution. He mops around the toilets quickly as a final job before heading back into the main hall.

Friday is the most significant day in terms of the Islamic week. It is marked out for a specific act of worship, the *Jumma* prayer, which replaces the usual *dhur* prayer that takes place at midday. Mondays and Thursdays are also given special status as marked out for optional fasts that especially devout Muslims may observe, but no other day within the week is given a status like that of Friday. The instruction for the *Jumma* prayer is directly from the Quran: -

Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of God and leave off your trading—that is better for you, if only you knew—then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out God’s bounty. Remember God often so that you may prosper. (Quran 62:9-10)

It is the busiest time of the week for the mosque (only the two eid prayers and *laylat al-qadr* attract larger crowds). The caretaker cleaning the mosque on a Friday begins a process of both marking out the space and the time as significant, and the cleaning activities initiates a ritual preparation. Just as Muslim worshippers perform bodily ablution prior to the *salah*, the mosque being cleaned, tidied and fragranced provides the cues to worshippers that the upcoming time is sacred, and the cleaning contributes to the ritual of the *Jummah*. On other Fridays, volunteers sometimes arrive early at the mosque to contribute to the tidying. They might ask the caretaker how they can help, or otherwise simply allocate themselves a responsibility such as vacuuming, and go about it. It is common, for example, to see Ashraf Mohammad, an elderly, retired gentleman over ninety years old, mopping the toilet floors. The cleaning of the mosque is an act individuals do out of a sense of righteousness but it also serves to communicate the importance of the upcoming time of *Jummah*. Volunteers taking part in the cleaning stresses the communal ownership of the mosque, as Durkheim argues (Pals 2006, 91), the mosque holds meaning partly because it doesn't belong to one person, but the community. Voluntarily cleaning the mosque and participating in its maintenance stresses and reasserts this communal ownership. Cleaning also serves to renew the mosque, eliminating the traces of previous activities, preparing it for a new time<sup>4</sup>.

At 11am, Zafar Turbani, the "Head Chef" of Jamia Masjid arrives. He unlocks the kitchen door and enters with a bag full of groceries. He is preparing the food that is sold after *Jummah* prayers on a Friday. His first act is to light the large industrial gas stoves. Mehdi, the caretaker, now begins lighting incense and placing it around the mosque. Some of these are thin incense sticks, placed in holders and on plastic food trays so the ash doesn't fall on the carpet. There are two larger Arabic *bukhoor* burners also. Mehdi uses a lighter to heat up a quick-fire coal, placing it in the wooden holder, and then adding a generous handful of scented woodchips on top. He leaves one in the foyer. As the woodchips burn, they release a thick and heavily scented smoke. Mehdi takes the second burner with him around the mosque, ensuring the smoke diffuses as widely as possible. They give off a powerful sweet sandalwood scent, and the thick smoke is especially visible in the streams of sunlight that enter through the windows.

The creation of sacred space is not simply a mental or abstract process, it is also sensory. The diffusion of the *bukhoor* mirrors the diffusion of *baraka* and the arrival of a sacred moment. The immediately identifiable fragrance of burning and scented woodchips tells the arriving congregation

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<sup>4</sup> The role of cleaning in maintaining and managing rhythms is noted by Smith and Hall in their examination of rhythmicity and the city (2013, 95).

that today the mosque is hosting something religiously significant. The mosque is not being prepared for the Mother and Toddler group, or the GCSE tuition, but something sacred. The *bukhoor* also works to mark out the time as sacred - it is transient, it lingers but not for long, and soon enough only the lightest traces of it remain. Similarly, the blessings of *Jummah* are not a permanent fixture, but will pass. It is currently waxing, increasing in intensity as the climax (the *Jummah* prayer) approaches. Sacred space is not static, and the burning woodchips provide the most appropriate means of marking both its temporal and spatial brevity.

Around noon, the first congregants begin arriving. Some go to make *wudu* but most head upstairs and sit reciting from a copy of the Quran. At 12.30pm, Dr Malik arrives. His role is self-appointed. He stands in the foyer, as he does every Friday, greeting worshippers and instructing them to take their shoes inside with them rather than leaving them on the floor. He stands sentinel out of a passion for an organised mosque, “if we can’t even sort out the shoes, how will we solve any problems?” he once told me. The numbers inside the mosque swell, filling up the bottom floor quickly. By 12.45pm, there are nearly 500 people in the mosque. The first floor is where the imam will stand and deliver his sermon, but the bottom floor allows for a quicker exit after the prayer, so it usually the bottom floor which fills most quickly. It is half-term for schools in Cardiff, meaning numbers are higher than usual as children are brought to the mosque by mothers who would otherwise not attend, and with high schoolers who have the free time to attend the mosque for Friday prayers are also present. Inside the halls, the quiet hum of the recitation of the Quran or *dhikr* (the silent chanting of particular religious phrases and words) can be heard. Almost every available wall space is taken up by someone sitting with their back against it.

Dr Malik’s presence here is part of the management of the mosque’s resources (in this case, the limited space for storage of shoes). On the days in which he is not present for a *Jummah* prayer, the haphazard storage of shoes often results in sprawling, uncoordinated piles. Shifting through these piles to find the correct shoes can delay worshippers on their exit, slowing an already sluggish march out. Dr Malik’s task is made more challenging by half-term. *Jummah* falling on a Friday afternoon generally restricts attendance to the retired, unemployed, self-employed, and those in a position to take a well-timed break from work. Those in education would either be unable to attend or would make arrangements within their school or university. During a half-term break however, school children have the choice to attend, and many do, which swells the numbers. During my fieldwork, I



was also informed several times that school breaks increase the number of mothers in attendance at *Jumma*, as they bring their young primary school aged children to the mosque to pray. The rhythms of work, school and prayer rarely beat in unison, but certainly impact upon each other. The student calendar has a marked and tangible impact on the mosque, which not only stresses the connectedness of Jamia Masjid to its local spatial environment, but also to the calendar and structuring rhythms in which the mosque is embedded. Returning to one of the original contentions of this chapter, time is not a uniform blank slate upon which social action takes place, but is as varied as the social and spatial environments humans traverse. This Friday is unique, a cross-section of several dozen rhythms of the city, the country, the globe, and the cosmos – some subtle, some overt – that means this is not simply any Friday, but a particular Friday.

On the first-floor hall, the mosque has several hundred worshippers. Everyone is engaged in some sort of worship – reading the Quran, performing prayers, making supplications or silently chanting. Conversations are hushed and short. There are nearly two hundred congregants on the first floor already. There are dozens of people reciting Quran independently and quietly, which leads to an audible murmur of communal recitation. The gentle melody is punctuated by the odd congregant who enters the hall and announces his presence with the greeting of *salam*, a handful may respond. The sound of recitation intensifies as more people enter and recite Quran as they wait for the *Jumma* prayer to begin. At 1.05pm, almost exactly, the imam, Shaykh Talha, ascends the *mimbar*.

*“Asalamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakhatu”.*

With this greeting made by Shaykh Talha, all recitation ends, all conversations are halted, and the only sound is people shuffling to return their Qurans to the bookshelves. Some move and sit closer to the *mimbar*. The *Jumma* prayer has begun.

The sensory creation of sacred space is a combination of the smell of burning woodchips and the sound of the communal recitation of Quran. The intensity of the sacred space increases with time as the worshippers enter into the presence of the moment of *Jumma*. It is a sacred moment, the formal beginning of which is marked by the imam ascending the *mimbar* and delivering his greetings of *salam*. At this point, the end of conversation and the shift in attention towards the centre of the mosque all represent a response to the change in the nature of time itself. Worshippers reorientate

themselves in time and in space, physically through their bodies but also mentally. New rules are in effect, Islamic teachings specify that worshippers should not speak during the *Jummah* prayer, which begins with the imams greeting to the congregation. The *salam* will be used in a similar way again shortly. The *salam* of the imam is a verbal threshold. It marks a temporal shift, a rhythmic tipping point.

The *mu'addhin* then gives the *adhan*, after which Shaykh Talha begins the *khutba*, which itself lasts around forty minutes. During this time, the mosque is filled to the brim. Despite the numbers, the only person speaking is the imam. During the *khutba*, no conversations, not even greetings, should be exchanged, and most follow this rule. The only exception is the quiet whispers shared between some of the teenagers who are keen not to be caught speaking.

Once the sermon is finished, the *iqama* is given, and Shaykh Talha leads the congregants in two cycles of prayer. The unusually warm weather along with the number of worshippers in the mosque makes it stuffy and uncomfortably warm. Perhaps knowing this, the Shaykh keeps the prayer short. Both cycles have recitation of the Quran read out loud. Shaykh Talha concludes the prayer by turning his head to the right, and saying "*asalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah*", and then to his left, once again saying "*asalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah*". The congregation repeat the action and the prayer is complete. After a brief pause, Muadh Waleed gets up and takes the microphone and lists out the week's announcements. He has only a few moments of silence before a wave of conversation becomes a din against which he must contend. Some congregants get up to leave immediately, creating a bottleneck near the exits. Others stay and perform supererogatory cycles of prayer. They are easily visible as they stand over the other worshippers who are sitting. Groups of conversation form towards the back of the hall, as friends meet and catch up. The march to the exit is slow, with hundreds of worshippers waiting to move down the stairs to the foyer.

The *salam* recited by the imam at the end of the prayer once again plays the role of a verbal threshold. It concludes the prayer. The sacred moment of *Jummah* has passed, and the sacredness it brought begins to wane. Before the concluding *salam*, the congregants are still, placid and reverent. Kneeling in organised rows, heads bowed and lips engaged in various pious devotions. After the concluding *salam*, a significant number of the worshippers begin a rushed exit, keen to return to

work before their allocated lunch break is over. The intensity of sacredness in the space of the mosque is now waning rather than waxing. The *adhan* is also a verbal threshold, and it has a spatial quality; it is heard within a proximate distance, but it is also temporal, it marks the time for prayer. These varied cues all point in the direction of the sacredness of the time in question, just as the concluding *salam* marked its cessation. The return of conversation shifts the rhythm away from the sacred. Just as congregants move ever further from the sacred moment of *Jummah* temporally, their walk towards the foyer, which is a liminal space in which shoes are placed back on, also marks the way in which sacredness has come to a close as the congregants physically distance themselves from its centre (the *mihrab*) and head out, away from the mosque.

The atmosphere outside is jovial, perhaps aided by the sunshine. People crowd around the front, waiting for their friends, family, colleagues or spouse to join them outside before heading off. Cars move slowly past the mosque. The activity gradually subsides as people leave. After about thirty minutes, around 2.15pm, the mosque is nearly empty. There are still two dozen or so people in the mosque. A crowd of elderly men sit upstairs talking. Several children sit on the opposite end of the prayer hall, crowded around one child's smartphone watching a video. Dr Haqqani is still in his office. The busiest period of the week has just ended.

Between 4pm and 5pm, the mosque is largely empty. The only worshippers present are those who were unable to make the *Jummah* prayer and so enter the mosque, pray alone, and leave. It is noteworthy too that the time between 4pm and 5pm is roughly equidistant between the time for *Jummah* and the time of *asr*, the next upcoming prayer. At some point in that hour, sacredness stops waning and begins to intensify once again.

Those who pray at the mosque alone during these moments of waning are "off-rhythm". Almost all the five daily prayers will have congregants who are unable to make the congregational prayer, and some arrive in their own time and pray. They missed the moment at which their actions would have the greatest spiritual and religious potency, but by praying at the mosque, they have at least captured the spatial potency of their prayer. The five formal prayers of Islam are structured around the movement of the sun in the sky. The timings of the prayers vary as the seasons change. Prayers which fall into the 5pm-7pm window on a weekday (which, depending on the time of year, can be *asr*, *maghrib* or *isha*) will be well attended by those finishing work who decide to pray on their way

home. Likewise, on a winter weekend it is common to find parents bringing their children to the mosque between 1pm and around 4pm. They will spend the entire afternoon in the mosque, “catching” *dhur*, *asr*, and *maghrib* prayers. In between the prayers, they might read the Quran or chat with friends if any are present. Their children will play with the other children. The condensed prayer times provide an opportunity for parents (mostly, but not exclusively, fathers) to informally, and in a relaxed environment, teach their children how to pray.

A degree of astronomical literacy allows an individual to deduce when a prayer is due, but would not inform the individual as to when a mosque is holding a congregational prayer. In Muslim-majority countries, mosques will usually air a call to prayer, broadcast through loudspeakers, which informs those who can hear it that the mosque will shortly be beginning its congregational worship (although practicalities differ from place to place). Jamia Masjid prefers to communicate the timings for prayer in a variety of innovative ways, reflecting modern technologies and also the geographic distribution of their congregation (most of whom don’t live in the immediate area of the mosque). The most prominently used method is the monthly timetable photocopied onto an A4 sheet and placed in the foyer as well as on other noticeboards (see Figure 6). These are also disseminated electronically via WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook. While the prayer may shift in terms of when it begins and when it concludes every day, the mosque attempts to choose timings for the congregational prayer that will remain as static as possible, so as to provide a sense of continuity to worshippers. These methods, largely modern, provide a way for a disparate congregation to fall into rhythm.

Figure 6

An example of a timetable (Ramadan 2014).

Day	Jun / Jul 2014	Ramadan 1435	Fajr		Sunrise	Dhuhr		Asr		Magrib	Isha	
			Imsak	Iqama		Azan	Iqama	Azan	Iqama		Azan	Iqama
Sun	29	1	02:58	03:10	4:58	13:26	13:45	17:40	19:15	21:39	22:45	22:45
Mon	30	2	02:59	"	4:59	13:26	"	17:40	"	21:38	22:44	"
Tue	1	3	03:00	"	5:00	13:27	"	17:41	"	21:38	22:44	"
Wed	2	4	03:02	"	5:00	13:27	"	17:41	"	21:38	22:44	"
Thu	3	5	03:03	"	5:01	13:27	"	17:41	"	21:37	22:43	"
Fri	4	6	03:05	03:20	5:02	13:27	"	17:41	"	21:37	22:43	"
Sat	5	7	03:06	"	5:03	13:27	"	17:41	"	21:37	22:43	"
Sun	6	8	03:07	"	5:03	13:28	"	17:41	"	21:36	22:42	"
Mon	7	9	03:09	"	5:04	13:28	"	17:40	"	21:36	22:42	"
Tue	8	10	03:09	"	5:05	13:28	"	17:40	"	21:35	22:41	"
Wed	9	11	03:11	"	5:06	13:29	"	17:40	"	21:35	22:41	"
Thu	10	12	03:12	"	5:07	13:29	"	17:40	"	21:34	22:40	"
Fri	11	13	03:13	03:30	5:08	13:29	"	17:40	"	21:34	22:40	"
Sat	12	14	03:15	"	5:09	13:29	"	17:40	"	21:33	22:39	"
Sun	13	15	03:16	"	5:10	13:29	"	17:40	"	21:32	22:38	"
Mon	14	16	03:18	"	5:12	13:29	"	17:39	"	21:31	22:37	"
Tue	15	17	03:20	"	5:13	13:29	"	17:39	"	21:30	22:36	"
Wed	16	18	03:21	"	5:14	13:29	"	17:39	"	21:29	22:35	"
Thu	17	19	03:23	"	5:15	13:29	"	17:39	"	21:28	22:34	"
Fri	18	20	03:24	03:40	5:16	13:29	"	17:38	"	21:27	22:33	22:35
Sat	19	21	03:27	"	5:18	13:29	"	17:38	"	21:25	22:31	"
Sun	20	22	03:28	"	5:19	13:29	"	17:38	"	21:24	22:30	"
Mon	21	23	03:29	"	5:20	13:29	"	17:37	"	21:22	22:28	"
Tue	22	24	03:32	"	5:22	13:29	"	17:37	"	21:21	22:27	"
Wed	23	25	03:33	"	5:23	13:29	"	17:36	"	21:19	22:25	"
Thu	24	26	03:35	"	5:24	13:29	"	17:36	"	21:18	22:24	"
Fri	25	27	03:37	03:50	5:26	13:29	"	17:35	"	21:17	22:23	"
Sat	26	28	03:39	"	5:27	13:29	"	17:35	"	21:16	22:22	"
Sun	27	29	03:40	"	5:29	13:29	"	17:34	"	21:14	22:20	"
Mon	28	30	03:42	"	5:30	13:29	"	17:34	"	21:13	22:19	"

### ***Late Afternoon - The Quran School***

As Chapter Two explored, once the largely male Muslim migrants to Britain began to settle and start families, there was a greater urgency for establishing mosques to meet the educational needs of Muslim children. Scourfield's project on Muslim childhood identified the central role played by mosques in religious upbringing (Scourfield et al. 2013). Thus, one ubiquitous activity found in mosques is the Quran School, sometimes called a *madrasa*, which provides instruction in basic religious literacy to Muslim children. Jamia Masjid's Quran School runs on weekdays between 5pm and 7pm.

At 4.30pm, children start entering the mosque. They arrive in small bursts. It is half-term but the Quran School is still running (only being cancelled for full-term breaks). There are about ten children in the first-floor hall at 4.35pm, all boys. The girls' classes run in the ground floor hall. None of the children are wearing their school uniforms, instead being dressed in a variety of casual clothes. Outside, a steady stream of parents drop their children off. On the first floor, thirty young children are gathered unsupervised, playing together. They are loud and energetic. An impromptu game of football breaks out using a rolled-up sock. There are no clear goals, or positions, but the game is simply focused on keeping ownership of the sock-ball. New players join the game as they arrive, while some others stop playing and retreat instead to a quieter corner.

The rowdy game continues until 4.55pm, when the first teacher arrives, Shaykh Ahmed Abdullah. The elderly, short teacher slowly enters the prayer hall and walks towards the spot in which he usually teaches. He has not said a word but his presence is enough to discipline the students. They immediately stop playing. A handful of students rush towards him, picking up a Quran from the bookshelves and a green Quran-holder which is stacked near the entrance of the prayer hall. Shaykh Ahmed sits down and his students sit in a circle around him. The remaining students have arranged themselves into five groups, and are sitting along the back wall of the mosque. Both the games and the subsequent groupings are rehearsed, the children have done this before. By 5.10pm, all the teachers have arrived and there are now nine groups of teachers, each with roughly ten students sitting around them. The communal recitation is loud, filling the hall with sound. The students recite from the Quran individually. They are called at times to sit in front of the teacher and deliver their allocated reading, the teacher correcting them if they make mistakes.

At 6.20pm, the *adhan* for *asr* is given to announce that the prayer time has begun. The *mu'addhin* is self-nominated, having waited nearest the microphone for several minutes along with other congregants who had arrived for the prayer. As the *adhan* is given, the recitation of the Quran from the children ceases and most wait in silence for the call to prayer to be completed. Some children use this opportunity for conversations with their neighbours. Upon completion of the *adhan*, the students return to reciting.

At 6.30pm, the *iqama* is given and the children get up. They place their Qurans and Quran holders at the back wall of the mosque and line up in three rows on the left side of the mosque (this arrangement ensures that all the children are visible, and none can misbehave in a corner out of sight). The adults present, about forty of them, line up in a single row at the front. Shaykh Talha takes his position as imam. The *asr* prayer is performed as four cycles and with a silent recitation. The stillness of the mosque during the prayer seems pronounced in comparison to the rowdiness of the Quran School. On a normal day, the Quran School would finish at 7pm. It is currently 6.45pm, but Shaykh Talha lets them go early. The timing of *asr* prayer during Spring interrupts the Quran School, leading to an awkward ten or fifteen minutes which is too little time to return meaningfully to the Quran classes. Some of the students leave with their parents who attended the *asr* prayer, others sit in the mosque until their parents come for them. By 7pm the mosque is empty.

The diverse timescape of the mosque is visible in this short extract. The mosque begins as a social space in which children play games, changing to an educational space, then moving to a prayer space, all within a period of a few hours. These shifts are the product of several demands on the mosque, as it must host a range of different and sometimes contradictory interactions. Accomplishing these shifts requires a significant degree of socialisation of congregants in the behaviour of the mosque. The children of the Quran School display a familiarity with the expectations on them, quickly moving into groups as soon as a teacher arrives and before being told to do so. Likewise, attendees of the mosque learn what is expected of them when the *iqama* is given, how to stand, and in what order, allowing the large numbers to organise themselves relatively quickly. To navigate such a varied timescape requires knowledge and practice by the attendees, they must pick up the various cues towards behaviour and respond attentively. Some of this socialisation is universal. The ritual prayer is the same globally, and thus responding to the *adhan* (lining up for

prayer, forming rows and so on) is done in roughly the same way across the world. Here I can introduce the term *adab*, which means etiquette, and which I use to highlight the informal “rituals” associated with space and meaning.

*Adab* can also be understood as spatial practice. People standing to attention, preparing themselves for the *salah* by cutting off communication or sitting facing the *qibla*, are all ways in which the formal ritual of prayer is prepared for and communicated to others present through *adab*. These small social cues are important in shifting the meaning of space. They are helped along by architectural features also. The alignment of the rows, facing the *qibla*, is guided by the markings on the floor of the mosque. The carpet has several straight lines running across the mosque that provide a basis for the prayer rows to be arranged. Each individual worshipper will ensure they stand on the line appropriately, adjusting to the person on either side, leading to some shuffling before prayer. This is done in a matter of seconds after the *iqama* is complete.

These two examples, the Quran School and the ritual prayer, also highlight the local and global contexts. The Quran School is idiosyncratic to Jamia Masjid, other mosques have their own educational classes, and will largely run them according to their own local needs - however the routine for prayer is global in the most literal sense. The universality of this routine is best evidenced in its use during the Muslim pilgrimages of Hajj and *umrah*. During visits to the Kaaba the only difference is that rather than forming straight rows, the rows will be circular, forming around the Kaaba itself. If the system of arranging oneself for prayer were anything but universal, Muslims would find themselves unable to pray with each other in global rites such as the Hajj. It should be observed too how the sacred rhythm of the prayers facilitates non-sacred and mundane meanings to spaces within mosques, it makes the space malleable and dynamic rather than fixed and immovable. This malleability of the sacred space is made even more important within the context of an interspatial mosque such as Jamia Masjid, which plays host to such a wide and varied range of activities. Thus, the children playing loud and boisterous games between prayer times doesn't challenge the sacredness of the mosque, as long as it ceases before the time for prayer.

### ***Evening - The Boys' Halaqa***

The flurry of the Quran School dies down almost as quickly as it started. Once the children and parents have left, the mosque is again silent, holding a pause between the rhythmic peaks. Shaykh Talha's *halaqa* begins at 7.30pm, and it is the next key happening at the mosque.

Shaykh Talha is sitting in the far corner with several Arabic books open in front of him, making notes on a notepad. At the other end of the mosque are ten young adults, some older teenagers, others are in their twenties. They are in animated conversation. Every

now and again, a person enters the prayer hall, walks over to the group, and shakes hands with everyone with a “*salam*” before sitting in the loose circle. At 7.34pm, Shaykh Talha announces “*shabaab*, let’s begin”. The young adults walk over and sit in a semi-circle around Shaykh Talha, who is sitting comfortably back against a wall on several cushions. The sisters’ *halaqa*, led by the Shaykh’s wife, is running concurrently in the Women’s Section. The topic of the boys’ *halaqa* today is “preparing for Ramadan”, a continuation of a topic that has been running for several weeks. The *halaqa* is delivered informally, almost in the Socratic method. Shaykh Talha asks questions of the students, they respond, sometimes being challenged by others present, he allows the challenges, sometimes interjecting with his own comment. Shaykh Talha introduces quotes and aphorisms of Muslim scholars on the topic of Ramadan, inviting attendees to give their response and views on the sayings. The *halaqa* ends with the *maghrib adhan* at 8.41pm. In the half hour prior to the *adhan*, more attendees join the *halaqa*, usually sitting just outside the immediate circle of attendees, as they wait for the *maghrib* prayer. When the *adhan* begins, Shaykh Talha hesitates, but then summarises the main points in a few sentences and closes with following words: -

*“Subhanakallahumma wa bihamdika,  
ash hadu anlaa ilaaha illa anta,  
astaghfiruka wa atoobu ilaik<sup>5</sup>”*

It is the usual *dua* for ending a gathering. Shaykh Talha says it while the *adhan* is being given, and it indicates the *halaqa* is now finished. The *shabaab* leave the *halaqa*, and either line up with the other congregants in rows or else go downstairs to make ablution for prayer. Immediately after the *adhan*, the *iqama* is given. Shaykh Talha leads the *salah*, reciting Quran in the first two cycles, but reading silently in third cycle. After the prayer is completed, the congregation offer two cycles of prayer individually.

Each of the many actions described above confer blessings or *baraka* to the participants and to the surrounding space. The prayer is one source of blessing, the *halaqa* is another source of blessing. Yet the blessings associated with the *halaqa* are not the same as the blessings of the *maghrib* prayer. Several different verbal thresholds are used, such as the *dua* to end the *halaqa* and the *adhan* to indicate the time for *maghrib*. The verbal thresholds help to demarcate and describe the boundaries

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<sup>5</sup> “Glory and praise to you O God, I declare there is nothing worthy of worship except you, I seek your forgiveness and I turn in repentance to you.”



and inflections of sacredness and *baraka*, and help structure how the congregants attend to the demands of each. This is management of temporal sacredness as well as spatial. The verbal thresholds are part of the *adab*. It is *adab* to close a meeting or *halaqa* with a *dua*, as it is *adab* to stand patiently and await the prayer. These all communicate shifts in the changing meanings of space across a timescape. As attendees entered the mosque before *maghrib*, sometimes joining the *halaqa*, they did not complete any optional or supererogatory prayers. In many *madhahib*, it is taught based on a Prophetic *hadith* that the time immediately during sunset and sunrise is forbidden for prayer. There is a general prohibition on praying immediately before *maghrib*. Some mosques in Cardiff utilise a small red lightbulb next to a sign reading “MAKRUH<sup>6</sup> TIME”. Jamia Masjid has no such means of communicating the timing, but generally the prohibition is maintained in practice. This indicates another inflection on the time, observing not only moments of prayer but moments in which prayer is forbidden.

The *shabaab* from the *halaqa* then head downstairs to the bottom hall. They pull out the table tennis tables which are folded away in the corner and two games begin. Some sit in a corner instead, talking. Others leave, returning twenty or thirty minutes later with food. Shaykh Talha joins the boys for the “Friday night chill” for ten minutes or so before leaving with a *salam* to those present. At around 10pm, a game of *Articulate* is started in the corner of the mosque. The game comes to an abrupt halt at 10.30pm, when the *adhan* for *isha* is heard over the speakers. The *adhan* marks the end of the game (rather than being marked by reaching the end of the board), and the winning team celebrates. The *shabaab* head upstairs. Imam Faraz is leading the prayer. Alongside the twenty *shabaab* now remaining, there are about fifteen other congregants. The *isha* prayer is four cycles. The congregants leave, including most of the *shabaab*, after the prayer. Only three of the older *shabaab* remain, packing away the game of *Articulate* and the table tennis tables. They switch off the lights in the mosque and exit, leaving the latch off and ensuring the doors are locked with a firm tug as they depart.

We now return to the ethnographic vignette presented in the early part of this chapter, of the shift from a social moment to a sacred one. Friday represents both the most sacred day of the week in the Islamic calendar but also the end of the working week, and a “Friday night chill” marks the beginning of the leisure activities associated with the weekend. The activities of Friday night in the

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<sup>6</sup> Makruh means disliked, and is a classification in *Hanafi fiqh* only a small degree below *haram* or forbidden. The sign “MAKRUH TIME” indicates it is the time in which praying is *makruh*.

mosque represent a nexus between the sacred activities of worship and the social activities of a Friday evening. The day fits into a wider week, which itself presents structuring elements to the mosque's timescape. Though this day was chosen to represent a variety of rhythms, the rhythms are ever-present. The rhythms are most visible during the zenith and peak (such as when congregants gather for a prayer), or else implicit during its trough or valley (such as when the mosque is empty between prayer times). Another day chosen could be analysed in the same way, its structuring rhythms drawn out and explored. A Monday during term-time would present a different nexus of rhythms, as would the mosque on Christmas Eve, or any given weekend.

I make three points based on this twenty-four hour overview of the mosque. The first is that human activity is rhythmic. Whether it is the working day or the sacred rhythm of daily prayers, the mosque is given life through these rhythms. The second is that the sacred space of the mosque is also temporal, just as the sacred time of the mosque is also spatial. Ritual marked time and space in Jamia Masjid, and it is the interconnectedness of the two I intend to stress. Finally, sacredness was dynamic. Sacred space was not a fixed quality, but it came and went, it waxed and waned. At times, the sacredness of the mosque was unavoidably pronounced, at other times, it was second to social, educational or other moments. Importantly, it never disappeared however, something I examine in Chapter Eight. In the next part of this chapter, I turn to a consideration of the rhythms that though present in a single day, are less visible due to their larger scope.

### ***The Wider Rhythms***

Larger rhythms are also present in the scope of a single day that are, due to their length, are not perceptible without taking in a wider view. Shaykh Talha's *halaqa* discusses the upcoming sacred month of Ramadan. Ramadan fits into an annual religious calendar of twelve months, each of which vary in sacredness. The two months prior to Ramadan, *Rajab* and *Shaban*, are noted for being important months of preparation for Ramadan. A supplication taught by the Prophet Muhammad to be made in the months leading up to Ramadan is: -

*"Allahumma bariklana fi Rajab wa Shaban and baligna Ramadan"*

The translation of this *dua* is "O God, bless us in *Rajab* and *Shaban*, and help us perfectly complete Ramadan". Such invocations mark the significance of the months, bringing greater intensity to the time. Another prayer, "*allahumma innaka affuwun, tuhibul afwa, fa'fuanna*"<sup>7</sup> is recommended in the last ten nights of Ramadan. So, specific actions are linked to specific times. Two months after

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<sup>7</sup> The translation of this *dua* is "Oh God, you are surely forgiving, and you love to forgive, so forgive me".

Ramadan is *Dhul-Hijjah*, the month of the pilgrimage. The first ten days of *Dhul-Hijjah* are compared to the last ten nights of Ramadan, as an extract from a Friday sermon expands upon: -

“The scholars have discussed, what is better? The ten days of Hajj, or last ten of Ramadan? They said the days of *Dhul-Hijjah* are better, and the nights of Ramadan are better. So, both are precious to us and we must use them”

*Khutba* by Shaykh Abdel-Kadir

The days of *Dhul-Hijjah* are the only time in the year in which the fifth pillar of Islam can be fulfilled (the Hajj). A pilgrimage made outside of this period is an *umrah* or a lesser pilgrimage, which although considered to be meritorious, is not equal to the Hajj. Thus *Dhul-Hijjah* marks a period in which several million Muslims from across the globe travel to Saudi Arabia. Many members of the mosque made the pilgrimage in 2013, which fell in October. These annual dates impact on sacredness - just as *baraka* waxes and wanes in the course of a single day, it does so too during the Islamic year. The blessings increase in intensity in the months prior to Ramadan, which is a sacred peak of the year. A contender for the most sacred period is undoubtedly *laylat al-qadr* (the Night of Power), a mysterious night of *baraka* that takes place in the last ten nights of Ramadan. Although Katz observes that *laylat al-Qadr* must vie with the *mawlid* for this title (2007, 146). The sacredness wanes after Ramadan, before and increasing again towards the days of *Dhul-Hijjah*. These times are marked by festivals, such as the eid celebrations at the end of Ramadan and after the days of Hajj, and by particular rites and acts of worship such as the fasting or the pilgrimage.

There are also several dates which are tied to the Prophet's biography, the celebration of which vary between Muslims. They include the month of *Muharram* (the Islamic New Year) and the day of the *Hijrah* - the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Makkah to Madinah. There is also the aforementioned *mawlid*, or the birthday of the Prophet, which is an intensely controversial and hotly contested issue, acting as a fault line between modern reformist Muslims who consider its celebration heretical, and Sufi Muslims who consider it an important Islamic tradition (in Chapter Nine, this issue is explored more closely, as it provides a unique case study in how sacredness can be disturbed). There are also dates such as *al-isra wal-miraj* which marks the Prophet Muhammad's reputed ascension into heaven. In Jamia Masjid, these dates related to the Prophet's biography may be used as inspiration for a Friday sermon, or the topic of a *halaqa*. As a Sunni mosque, dates such as *Ashura* (the day in which the Prophet's grandson Hussain was killed) largely pass by without reference, despite their significance within Shi'i Islam. What all this stresses however, is that the calendar has relevance to the congregation. Time is important. It has contours of sacredness which

are created, traversed, and experienced by the congregants of Jamia Masjid. Giving attention to the timescape helps avoid the fallacy of treating time as a homogenous blank slate which can be ignored, a diagram of the diverse rhythms perceived in Jamia Masjid is detailed in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7

Islamic Calendar												
Ramadan (1434 AH)	Shawwal	Dhul- Qaida	Dhul- Hijjah	Muharram (1435 AH)	Safar	Rabbi I	Rabb i II	Jumada I	Jumada II	Rajab	Shaban	Ramadan (1435 AH)
Solar Calendar												
July (2013 CE)	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan (2014 CE)	Feb	March	April	May	June	July (2014 CE)
Daylight												
Days Getting Shorter / Later Fajr, Earlier Isha (leading to Winter Solstice)						Days Getting Longer / Earlier Fajr, Later Isha (leading to Summer Solstice)						
University Calendar												
University Summer Break		University Term Starts Students Return to the Mosque			Christmas/New Year Holidays		2nd Term of University  University Elections		Easter  Break	3rd Term of University		Summer Holidays
School Calendar												
School Summer Holidays		School Term Starts  School Visits to Mosque			Xmas/NY Break		School Term  School Visits to Mosque		Easter  Break	School Term  School Visits to Mosque		
Mosque Activities												
Ramadan Activities  Regular Activities Suspended		Regular Activities Restart	Hajjis Prepare to Leave	Hajjis Return  Islamic New Year		Christmas Break Events  Regular Activities Suspended	Regular Activities Restart		Short Break in Regular Activitie s for Easter	Regular Activitie s Restart	Preparation for Ramadan	
Significant Islamic Dates												
Eid al-Fitr			Eid al-Adha		Islamic New Year			Milad an-Nabi				
6 Days of Shawwal			Ashura		Isra wal-Miraj   Mid-Shaban							
10 Days of Dhul-Hijja												

Perhaps the largest rhythm that structures the use of the mosque is the oscillation of the solar and lunar calendars. The solar year is the basis for the Gregorian calendar. By contrast, the Islamic calendar of worship is calculated according to the lunar year, which is linked to the lunar phases. The lunar year is eleven or twelve days shorter than a solar year and so each lunar year shifts in relation to the solar calendar. In practice this means that key festival dates, such as Ramadan, begin eleven to twelve days earlier every solar year, travelling backwards through the seasons. Ramadan in 2013 started on July 9<sup>th</sup>. In 2014, Ramadan began on 29<sup>th</sup> June. In 2015, it began on June 18<sup>th</sup>. Ramadan during these years falls in the middle of Summer, and the length of the fasts can reach twenty hours due to the proximity to the summer solstice. Sixteen years ago, Ramadan fell around the winter solstice, leading to notably shorter days of fasting. During my fieldwork in 2013-2014, the fasts started around 2am and ended past 9pm. Many reflected on their experiences of the fasting: -

“You’re not old enough to remember the last time it was like this. There weren’t even any mosques in Cardiff back then. We would have to pray *tarawih* in each other’s houses.” An elderly member of the congregation sharing his experiences during the *iftar* meal at the mosque, Ramadan 2014.

“The last time we broke our fasts at this time, we were young like you. The next time you break fasts at a time like this, you will be old like us.” Saeed Intishaar addressing the congregation, particularly the younger audience, during a reminder in Ramadan 2013.

The relationship between the solar calendar, the lunar calendar and Ramadan present a generational narrative. It takes thirty-three years for Ramadan to travel through an entire year, a rhythm that can only ever be experienced through a lifetime, at most two or three times. Why are these larger rhythms important? They show how the big rhythms construct the small differences of a single day, and how meanings are attached to time and to space. The calendars, industrial and religious, represent a wider human activity of codifying time, identifying patterns, and attaching (or interpreting) meaning from them. These rhythms stretch from the everyday to the generational, from the immediate to the cosmic. Ultimately, to adequately perceive and understand the sacred making activities of the mosque, one must be conscious that the local and specific actions of prayer, fasting, and *adab* take place in a timescape that stretches into the past and into the future, through the cyclical rhythms they are nestled within.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a single day in the mosque, and observed, over the course of about twenty hours, how the space within the mosque changed and shifted in terms of the meaning of the space. What this serves to illustrate is that time is of consequence in the construction of the meanings of space, and in particular, sacred space. The sacredness in the mosque waxed and waned and was marked through ritual and *adab*, which I describe as equivalent to spatial practice in a Lefebvrian sense (Lefebvre 1991). These included cleaning, ablution, the lighting of incense, and verbal thresholds to indicate the beginning and end of certain types of sacred moments. Sacred spaces, in the context of the mosque, are primarily spaces of *baraka*, something that will be explored more closely in the next chapter. The meanings of space, across time, can be described as rhythms. Some of these rhythms are sacred, others are industrial or social, and they all intersect to create the timescape of the mosque, a term I use to describe the varied way in which time is experienced. Rhythms also contributed to the malleability of the space within the mosque. This is important for Jamia Masjid, in which a single day includes a huge range of activities, not all of which are overtly sacred and not all of which are rituals that bring about *baraka*. My contributions in this chapter are to demonstrate the connectivity of sacred time and sacred space, to show how rhythm is significant in structuring human activity, and how sacredness itself is rhythmic, coming and going rather than being sedentary or static. I return to a quote from Katz first introduced in the literature view, she writes that “the idea that time is inherently patterned, with some days or months intrinsically privileged over others, is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition” (Katz 2007, 143). This chapter reveals the way in which this patterned privileging of time is experienced within Jamia Masjid.

## Chapter Eight – *Baraka* in the Mosque

### ***Introduction***

“This is God’s House. It isn’t like other places. You can feel the *baraka*, just sitting here”

The term *baraka* is repeatedly used by the congregation to describe the quality that marked out Jamia Masjid as something special. When the opportunity presented itself, I would ask congregants how they would sum up the mosque in a single phrase. “*Baraka*” and its English equivalent, “blessed”, emerged as undeniably important terms. I adopt the emic term *baraka* since to ignore it would be to misconstrue how the congregation discuss the mosque. In the previous chapter, I outlined how *baraka* was a quality related to a sacred rhythm observed by the congregation, a rhythm tied to the cosmos as well as the solar day, that interacted with the various other structuring rhythms of social life. In this chapter, I turn to look more closely at *baraka* and the actions associated with it. In my previous chapter, I provided an account of the temporality of spatial practices of ritual and worship. I contended that sacredness waxed and waned throughout the day, reaching peaks of intensity around sacred moments. The reader may then ask, if this is the case, what is sacred about the mosque, if at all? If *baraka* comes and goes, why is the mosque a place of *baraka*? What creates permanence to the blessings of the mosque? To answer this question, I look at the ritual of *salah*, as well as the *adab* or etiquette that is associated with the mosque. To bring these practices into sharper focus, I look beyond the mosque also, to see how *baraka* can break into other spaces and places. The three parts of this chapter look, firstly, at religious activity in a religious space; secondly, at mundane activities in a religious space; and, thirdly, religious activity in a mundane space. I argue that ritual, the body, and orientation are key aspects in the construction of the sacred - within a Muslim context, these factors work to construct *baraka*. *Baraka* transforms space and time in different ways, but in the case of *salah*, it does so through the creation of “heterotopias”. I borrow this term from Foucault, who first outlined it in *The Order of Things* (1971). It was subsequently developed by Soja in *Thirdspace* (1996). My interest in the term is its stress on “otherness”. I use heterotopia to describe places and times which are both here and now, but also there and then, bringing together religious pasts and futures into a single moment. The repeated action of the *salah* in the mosque creates a permanence of blessing, which is recognised and communicated through the *adab* maintained in the space. There are then two subtle distinctions in spaces of *baraka*, space which is blessed (by Muslims performing worship and *salah*) and blessed space (which demands the worshippers maintain the appropriate *adab*). These two processes, of creating and maintaining *baraka*, are in a relationship. This dialectic relationship creates a new way to understand sacred

space, one which recognises, to adapt Berger's term, the social reality of sacred space (adapted from his 1969 work *The Social Reality of Religion*). An important argument in this chapter is that sacred space is a process.

### ***What is Baraka?***

*Baraka* is translated as blessing, but it is a more complex term than such a translation might imply. It is a word repeatedly used by congregants to describe everything from a numinous religious experience to a feeling of enjoyment and contentment. It can be used to refer to multitude and increase (praying for *baraka* in one's wealth is common), or simply a feeling of belonging. It might be thought of in a similar way to sacred – *baraka* is also about significance. Yet the term *baraka* is undeniably connected to the Divine, in a way that perhaps "sacred" once was, but no longer is. *Baraka* and blessings are also not diametrically opposed to the profane as is the case with the sacred. Rather, *baraka* is something that can seep into all aspects of life, but its source is a connection to the Divine. *Baraka* can be found in actions, texts, people, places, and times. It is undoubtedly fuzzy, in fact, its ubiquity and utility are perhaps a result of its fuzziness. Similar to how Cohen (1993) argues that communities form around open and contested symbols, whose ambiguity is central to the symbol's successful mobilisation, *baraka* serves as an open, ambiguous term to describe a wide range of positive religious connotations. I don't intend to offer a definition of the term, since doing so would be to artificially crystallise it, but the reader will be able to observe when and how the term is deployed by the congregants in the following chapters.

To guide the reader, it is worth clarifying the distinction between *baraka* and sacredness. Within this thesis, sacred refers to the concept of significance, in an open and undogmatic way. I accept the many divergent descriptions of sacred discussed in the literature review. Durkheim and the situational approaches reviewed (such as Knott and Smith's) provide a constructionist view of the sacred. Eliade and the scholars of the substantive approach view sacred primarily through the lens of those who encounter them – a phenomenological methodology. I will utilise both divergent descriptions in the coming chapter, and provide a unifying analysis in Chapter Ten which stresses how the two approaches can be combined (and must be combined to account for the sacred in Jamia Masjid). Sacred space is diverse - Christian and Muslim sacred spaces are not the same. *Baraka* is the term I utilise to signify Muslim sacred space. Thus, sacred space, when used, refers to a body of literature of how significant space is constructed and includes *baraka*. When *baraka* is used, it refers to a particular type of Muslim sacred space with a specific means of construction outlined throughout this thesis, but with accounts available also in other works that focus on Muslim sacred space (Metcalf 1996; Desplat and Schulz 2012; Cormack 2013).



### ***The Prayer***

The ritual *salah* takes place five times a day. “Was there ever a time the mosque didn’t do the five prayers?” I asked Saeed, who replied “only when we closed for refurbishments, it wouldn’t be a mosque otherwise, would it?” It’s a view many shared, the mosque was there for the daily prayers, and all other activities were secondary. In addition to the five daily *salah*, there are other prayers that take place individually or communally. A particularly pious worshipper may offer supererogatory prayers either side of the compulsory ones. Communally, the mosque organises occasional *tahajjud* prayers that take place in the middle of the night, as well as *tarawih* prayers in Ramadan, and *Salatul Khusuf* prayers during a solar or lunar eclipse. The five daily prayers, *fajr*, *dhur*, *asr*, *maghrib*, and *isha* remain the staple activities of any mosque however.

To convey a sense of the *salah*, and its relationship with *baraka*, extended ethnographic sections are presented below. These will provide the reader with an account of the prayer from the perspective of a single congregant, Mustafa, and provide the basis for the arguments made regarding the nature of *baraka* as well as the construction of sacred space.

On one evening, a visiting scholar, Shaykh Abdul-Aziz, is delivering a class on the *salah*. It takes place in the main hall from 7pm. The Quran School has finished, and the *isha* prayer is just over an hour away, emptying the mosque of the congregation. Shaykh Abdul-Aziz is sat with his back against the wall at the far end of the mosque, facing towards the hall. He has a wooden book-holder in front of him, intricately carved and varnished to a dark brown. A book is on top of it, a thick Arabic tome with calligraphy on the front and bound in a faux-leather. His glasses are resting on top of the book, and he occasionally puts them on to consult the written text. “*Salah* is about the unity between action and intention, the esoteric and exoteric, the inward and the outward. This is what Ghazali is writing about.” Shaykh Abdul-Aziz is an Indian scholar visiting Cardiff who has agreed to deliver a class as a special guest. He is a graduate of the eminent *dar ul-uloom* of Nadwa, based in Lucknow, India. His English is impeccable though heavily accented, and he speaks charismatically and with controlled passion. His students sit around him in a semi-circle, seven in total. Some have pens and paper, making notes, others sit and listen intently. The relative silence of the mosque gives his words a slight echo, adding even more gravitas to his emphatic style.

The content for this evening’s class is taken from the book *Revival of Religious Sciences* by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (died 1111). Shaykh Abdul-Aziz is focusing on Ghazali’s chapter on the prayer. “Al-Ghazali spends one page on the *fiqh* of prayer, but he spends ten

pages writing about the meaning of prayer. We should do the same. Spend ten percent of your effort making sure the actions of prayer are correct, but ninety percent of your effort making sure the heart is correct.” Of his seven students, myself and Raj are the only “born Muslims”. The rest are white converts of various ages, including Mustafa.

In Ramadan 2013, Mustafa converted to Islam. He is English, twenty-five-years-old, and by his own account, had been interested in Islam for several years, reading books and watching videos online about the faith. Moving to Cardiff for a job and encountering the Jamia Masjid felt like “God’s plan” to him, and so he formally “accepted” Islam at a ceremony during the holy month. The ceremony itself took place in the Jamia Masjid office, led by Dr Haqqani, with myself and three others crammed into the small room as witnesses.

Mustafa is well-read and well-travelled. Despite being a new convert, he is familiar with Islam. He knows its key tenets, he has read Martin Ling’s biography of the Prophet Muhammad so many times that he claims he knows it “off-by-heart”, and he has even taken some introductory Arabic classes such that he has a basic grasp of Quranic Arabic and its pronunciation. Having spent time in India and the Middle-East travelling, he feels comfortable with his new faith and the multi-ethnic congregation of Jamia Masjid. He has not however had much experience in the orthopraxis of the faith, such as how to worship, or the etiquettes that shape daily life. “I thought I knew Islam, but I have so much to learn,” he admitted. To learn about his new faith, he has started attending the New Muslim Classes on a Tuesday evening in Jamia Masjid.

The New Muslim *Halaqa* was a newly instituted class, pushed for strongly by Dr Haqqani, who felt it was important that Jamia Masjid provide some sort of structured and coherent programme for new Muslims. “Otherwise, we don’t know where they will learn Islam from” was Dr Haqqani’s warning. Raj had responsibility for the male classes, and Rachael, also a convert to Islam, oversaw the female classes. In the early part of my fieldwork, the curriculum was haphazard and ad-hoc. Several months after the classes started however, Dr Haqqani called a meeting with both Hasan and Rachael and presented a new syllabus, following an Islamic Studies book published in English. “We should be systematic and organised,” he explained to the two teachers. Shaykh Abdul-Aziz is visiting Cardiff as part of a speaking tour across South Wales, and both Raj and Dr Haqqani agreed that departing from the syllabus for a special class from Shaykh Abdul-Aziz would be valuable to the new converts.

The *halaqa* ends at 8.15pm when the *adhan* for *isha* is given. Shaykh Abdul-Aziz acknowledges the beginning of the *adhan* with a moment's pause mid-sentence, before continuing with his point but finishing quickly. "And now it is time for prayer" he says, closing the book, taking off his glasses and beginning to rise. The students take this as a sign he has finished the class, and thank him as they too get up to pray. It is an abrupt end to the *halaqa*, interrupted by the *adhan*, but which gives Mustafa an opportunity to put his new knowledge on the meaning of prayer into practice.

The class disbands and walks to the centre of the main hall joining the congregation who are waiting for the *adhan* to finish. The chandeliers are switched on, but not the lights fitted into the ceilings. This gives the hall a warm and soft illumination. The *mu'addhin*, Zafar, stands at the front and recites into the microphone. Shaykh Talha is standing next to him, waiting to begin the prayer. There are about two dozen others in the hall, with more arriving every moment. Mustafa stands at the back. When the *adhan* is complete, the *iqama* is given immediately, which brings everyone to their feet. Mustafa follows their reaction, moving from the back of the hall and immediately getting into a row. The carpet of the mosque has lines for this purpose, helping the worshippers to form straight rows facing the *qibla*, the direction of Makkah. Silently, the congregation shuffles to form straight lines. A gap emerges in the row in front of Mustafa. The congregants to either side of it look back and gesture towards him, he takes the invitation and steps forward. There are about a hundred worshippers in the hall by the time Shaykh Talha begins the prayer.

Facing the *qibla* is the first action of the prayer itself. The *qibla* is the direction of Makkah from one's location, in Britain this is generally south-east. One of Jamia Masjid's side walls faces the *qibla*, and so worshippers can form lines facing it directly. Once you enter the hall, the side *qibla* wall immediately becomes the front of the mosque, as architecture, carpeting and people's orientation all arrange themselves accordingly.

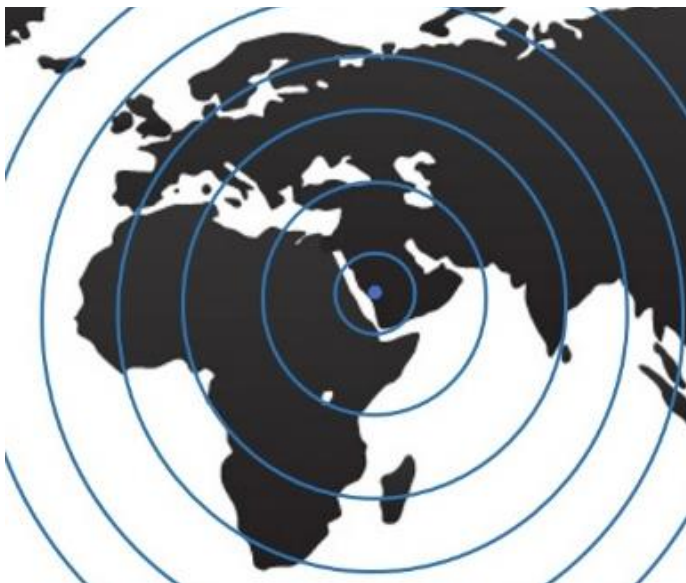
Shaykh Abdul-Aziz spoke earlier about the importance of the *qibla*.

"Facing the *qibla* isn't just a physical action. It is a spiritual action. You are turning your face towards Allah, you are arranging your body, your heart, your soul to Islam. And you are not facing Allah alone, your brothers and sisters face it with you, not just in prayer, but everywhere, in every mosque, all over the world, you all face towards the Kaaba, the home of Ibrahim, the home of Muhammad. And not just humans, the *jinn*s too, and

the angels in every single *samawat*<sup>8</sup>, they all face the *qibla*. And you make your intention ‘I turn my face to Allah the Majestic, the Originator of the Heavens and the Earth, as a *Hanif*<sup>9</sup>, like Ibrahim, and I do not associate any partners with Him’. This is the first action of the *salah*. It is the most important. It is what makes the *salah*. It is what makes what you do more than just exercise. In the Quran, Allah says ‘for every religion we have given a *qibla*’, this *qibla* is ours as Muslims, it is what makes us Muslims.”

Turning towards the *qibla* as the first act of prayer is given an emphasised role by Shaykh Abdul-Aziz. It is a physical and spiritual reorientation. Physical by action, and spiritual through the “intention” that accompanies it. It forms a global connection, first to other Muslims who are also facing the *qibla*, and secondly to a spiritual world. When Shaykh Abdul-Aziz references angels, he refers to a teaching within Islamic texts that there is a Kaaba marked on each of the seven heavens of creation (the world which humans inhabit being the first of these seven). When Muslims turn to face the Kaaba, a cosmic concordance takes place between the heavens and Earth. This physical and

Figure 8



spiritual reorientation of the individual or the congregation imbues the space inhabited with a new meaning and a new relevance, achieved via the connections that now exist between the *dunya* and the seven heavens. On the physical plane, every mosque is arranged to face the Kaaba, and every worshipper in line with the mosque. In much the same way, Jamia Masjid is orientated to face the Kaaba and the worshippers inside stand in alignment with it for worship. The

mosques and worshippers within them form concentric circles across the globe all centred on the Kaaba in Makkah. Like the cartographic lines on a map, one could draw lines on a globe, showing how an individual mosque is connected to a wider whole, every mosque marking the globe in a circular pattern (see Figure 8). The lines onto which worshippers arrange themselves become the means by which the local mosque becomes part of a global whole. There is no ritual process of sanctification necessary for a space to belong to the global network of mosques, only the individual

<sup>8</sup> *Samawaat* means heavens.

<sup>9</sup> *Hanif* is the religion of Ibrahim (analogous to Abraham in the Biblical tradition) as described in the Quran.

or communal turning towards the Kaaba coupled with an intention for prayer. This reorientation opens the channels of *baraka* to descend onto that person, that place and that time.

Two key ideas emerge in this first step of the construction of *baraka*. The first is the importance of bodily orientation. The second is the importance of connection. The bodily orientation creates the connection with the *ummah*, with every other mosque and with the spiritual heavens. There is a localised and globalised aspect to the orientation and the connection. Each individual orientates towards the Kaaba for prayer, connecting them to the person they stand next to. It is a localised practice, but one which is found globally. The universal nature of it is essential for the communal practice of prayer itself. A Muslim from Cardiff can walk into a mosque in Indonesia and pray in much the same way, with the same actions and the same *adab*. The *salah* is global.

Once the shuffling in the main prayer hall ceases and the rows finish forming, the imam, Shaykh Talha, looks over the congregation. “Shoulder to shoulder, feet to feet” he reminds them, before turning around and clipping a small microphone to the lapel of his jacket. During the renovation of Jamia Masjid in 2008, a small niche for the imam was built. This is a traditional feature of mosque architecture. It sits in the middle of the wall, and faces the *qibla*. It thus becomes the central point of the mosque. After a small cough, Shaykh Talha announces loudly “*allahu akbar*”, bringing his hands to his ears, before folding them onto his chest. The congregation follows, and there is a gentle murmur of “*allahu akbar*” as they repeat his words. The prayer has begun.

Shaykh Abdul-Aziz questioned the New Muslim Class on this action earlier. “What does *allahu akbar* mean?” he posed. Mustafa is the first to respond, “God is the Greatest”. “No” replies Shaykh Abdul-Aziz. The Shaykh leans in and says, “it means God is *greater*”. In Arabic, it is missing a noun, you would expect there to be a word that follows *akbar*, but Allah leaves it empty. Why? To remind you, Allah is greater than your worries, greater than your ego, greater than your prejudices, greater than any idea of Allah you hold in your head, Allah is greater, always greater, than anything you can say. “And when you raise your hands in prayer, it is surrender, you open your hands as if to say, ‘I give up’, ‘I surrender to you Allah’, you have to feel it in here” The Shaykh points to his chest emphatically. “And then you look down, not up, not straight ahead, you look down, because you are now in the court of Allah, you stand in front of Him!”

The physical action of raising the hands and stating “*allahu akbar*” is the formal beginning of the prayer. This action, like the verbal thresholds discussed earlier, places the worshipper in a new state,

a blessed state. They can no longer talk, or commit an action not part of the prayer or they would invalidate their worship. They are in communion in God, and in this sense, their body is a site of blessing. The space around the worshipper also becomes transformed. Upon starting the prayer, Shaykh Abdul-Aziz stresses God's intervention into the space. The worshippers are, in one sense, standing in the court of God facing Him – in another, God is standing in front of the congregants as they worship Him in the mosque. The space is a duality, here and there, simultaneously. The product of this heterotopia is *baraka*. This also changes what activities can and cannot be done. There is a new behaviour expected from congregants now that they have started the prayer. They should not look directly ahead, lowering their gaze, so as not to look in the direction of God. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, prayer creates a sacred moment. In this sacred moment, the congregants have access to a ritual time, an "Eternal Present" (Eliade and Trask 1959, 88) that exists outside of the mundane time of daily life but is continuously available through ritual.

As silence spreads in the prayer hall once again, Shaykh Talha begins his recitation. Every prayer includes *Surah al-Fatiha*, the opening chapter of the Quran. It is not always read out aloud however, but it is for the *isha* prayer. Shaykh Talha is regarded as a talented reciter, he studied and qualified as a *qari*, a Quranic reciter. The translation of the *Fatiha* is as follows: -

*In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy!*  
*Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds,*  
*the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,*  
*Master of the Day of Judgement.*  
*It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help.*  
*Guide us to the straight path:*  
*the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have not gone*  
*astray. (Quran 1:1-7)*

Upon finishing the final word of the chapter "*dalin*" in Arabic, the congregation respond with "*ameen*". Shaykh Abdul-Aziz taught the New Muslim *Halaqa* that "we say *ameen* in the prayer because the angels are there, waiting, to carry up your *ameen* to Allah, so that Allah can grant you what you ask for, to shower you with *hidaayah*<sup>10</sup> and *baraka*." After the congregation say *ameen*, Shaykh Talha begins reciting several more verses from the Quran. The verses chosen to follow the recitation of *Fatihah* can be any the

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<sup>10</sup> Translation: guidance

imam wishes to recite from the Quran. Shaykh Talha recites the final two verses of the chapter of *al-Baqarah*, the second chapter of the Quran. The translation is below: -

*"The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers,' they say, 'We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!'"*

*God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear: each gains whatever good it has done, and suffers its bad— Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or make mistakes. Lord, do not burden us as You burdened those before us. Lord, do not burden us with more than we have strength to bear. Pardon us, forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our Protector, so help us against the disbelievers."* (Quran 2:284-286)

The imam once again announces "*allahu akbar*", and the congregation bow. A pause. "*samiallah huliman hameeda*" said by the imam brings everyone upright again, the translation of the phrase being "God hears the one who praises Him". The worshippers quietly respond "*rabbana walakal hamd*" meaning "O Lord, to you is all praise". Another pause, and Shaykh Talha announces "*allahu akbar*" again. The congregation follow his actions and descend into prostration, forehead, palms, knees and feet touching the ground. Some complete the motion gracefully, others with difficulty. There are a dozen chairs in the left corner in the first row for elderly worshippers unable to complete the motions, and so they pray sitting. One can hear a wave of joints cracking as the hundred or so worshippers descend onto the thick carpet.

Half an hour earlier, Shaykh Abdul-Aziz had spent some time stressing the importance of the prostration to his class. "Why do we prostrate? Just for exercise? No, we prostrate because we were created to prostrate. We prostrate because Iblis did not prostrate. We prostrate because we can never be closer to Allah than when we prostrate. We do *sujood* because it puts our heart above our head, we are not people of intellect alone, we are people of the heart. We prostrate because one day Allah will command us to bow and only those who worshipped Him in this life will be able to worship Him in the next, and those who refused Him in this life will have to stand obstinate and proud in front of Allah on that day when there is no shade but the shade of Allah!"

The prostration is of symbolic importance. The worshippers recreate a primordial past as well as an eschatological future. Quranic history recounts that on the creation of Adam, the first human, all the angels were commanded to bow down before him. All of them did except Iblis, an appointed archangel (but not an angel himself), who felt insulted by the idea and who, in the Quranic narrative, says “I am better than him” (Quran 7:12). His refusal to obey results in him being cast out of heaven and given the title of “adversary”, in Arabic, “*Shaytaan*”, analogous to the Biblical “Satan”. The human prostration to God echoes the refusal of Iblis. It also foreshadows a future, described in certain Prophetic narrations, that after the end of the world God will bring all of humanity from the first to the last together and command them to bow, but only those who worshipped Him will be capable of doing so. Both moments exist in the moment of the prostration, in which the past, the present, and the future come together. The action of prostration interrupts the present moment, and connects the space in which it occurs to a cosmic history and a cosmic future. Thus, the heterotopia is here (the mosque) and there (God’s court) as well as being now (Tuesday evening *isha* prayer) and then (the primordial past and the eschatological future).

Space can only be experienced temporally, and time can only be experienced spatially. The interconnectedness of the two is stressed in the *salah* which marks time and space, and interrupts the here and now with *there* and *then*. Eliade’s description of the “Eternal Present” is apt for this, as a time that is always and forever, a ritual time, a constant which is “indefinitely recoverable” (Eliade and Trask 1959, 88). In the Muslim context, the Eternal Present is available to the worshipper through *salah*, but becomes more potent and more accessible at the times of prayer – the peaks of the sacred rhythm of daily prayers. It can also be stressed how the rhythmic actions of the *salah* itself produce these meanings in space and time - the standing, bowing, prostrating, sitting, and repetition. It is a spatial practice that produces space, and a temporal practice that produces time (referring to Lefebvre’s spatial triad (1991)), something looked at in closer detail in Chapter Ten).

Upon completing the prostration, a single cycle of prayer is complete. The *isha* prayer is four cycles. The first two include a verbalised recitation by the imam, however for the last two cycles, the imam recites quietly, and the congregation stand in reverent silence. As the prayer comes to completion, the congregants sit kneeling. They recite the *tashahud*, translated in my own words below: -

*Greetings to Allah, and prayers and all that is good.*

*Peace be upon you O Prophet, and the mercy and blessings of God.*

*Peace be upon us, the worshippers of God and the righteous.*



*I declare there is nothing worthy of worship except God,  
And I declare Muhammad His servant and messenger.*

Shaykh Abdul-Aziz questioned the class on the *tashahud* earlier in his distinctive style. “Do you know what the *tashahud* means? Not what the words mean, but what it means?” There is silence. “It means, my brothers, that you are in the heavens, no, that is wrong, you are beyond them. Somewhere else totally, it’s not even somewhere brothers. You are saying the words that Allah and His Prophet Muhammad exchanged in the *Isra wal Miraaj*. When he went past *Sidratul Muntahar*, do you know what that is?”

“The Lote Tree,” one of the students interjected.

“Yes, Lote Tree, it is the Lote Tree that marks the end of the seventh heaven. Nothing can go beyond that. Not even Jibraeel<sup>11</sup>. It is somewhere beyond somewhere my brothers. It is not of anything we can comprehend, it is not anything we have ever experienced. It was in that place, if I can call it a place, that the Prophet went, and it was in that place that the first *tashahud* was recited, Allah commanded him to tell his *ummah* to pray the *salah*, to make *sujood*. And when the commandment came down with the Prophet, the *salah* preserves a fragment of that. When we say the *tashahud*, it is a connection that connects that moment and that place when Allah and his Prophet met, to you, when you pray. That is in fact the meaning of *salah*, it is from *wasl*, meaning a connection, to touch”.

Shaykh Abdul-Aziz’s exegesis conveys an abstract idea. The narrative of the *Isra wal Miraaj* (The Night Journey and Ascent) is part of the Prophetic biography. The point at which the Prophet Muhammad passes the Lote Tree, *Sidratul Muntahar*, forms the inspiration for many mystical movements and treatises. It is an ineffable moment - the *hadith* are reticent about what took place, and even the Quran uses a vague metaphor for it, describing the moment as when the Prophet Muhammad was “at a distance of two bow lengths, or nearer still” (Quran 53:9) to God. The ineffability of it, however, carries with it in an incredible sense of sacred awe. It is aptly captured by Otto’s description of the “numinous”, a moment of terrible fascination, wonder and mystery (Otto and Harvey 1958). The *salah* connects the worshipper and the space they are in, to other worshippers, other mosques, the Kaaba in Makkah, and the Kaaba of each of the seven heavens. Temporally, the *salah* brings a primordial past and an eschatological future into the present. It goes further still, and connects to an ineffable place beyond description. It is an element of the ineffable

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<sup>11</sup> Jibraeel is analogous to Gabriel of the Biblical tradition, the archangel.

“other” that is brought into the here and now through the worship, the most transformative and most intense source of *baraka*.

Following the final *tashahud*, the prayer is concluded by Shaykh Talha turning to his right and then to his left, saying the following each time: -

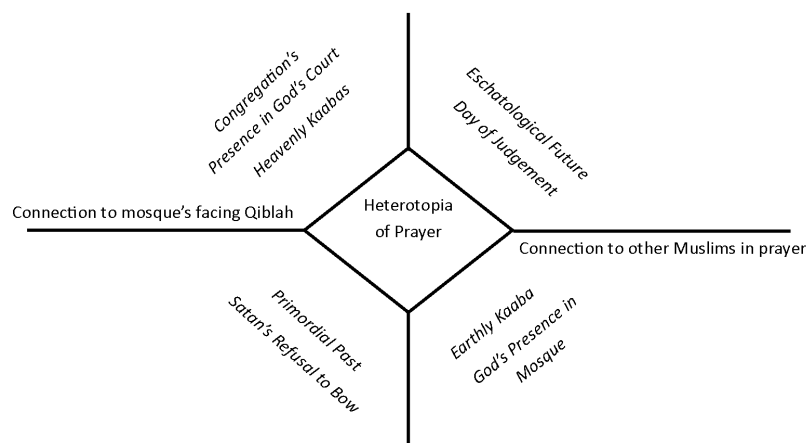
“*Asalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah*”

Shaykh Abdul-Aziz makes the point about the closing greetings of the prayer that “you are giving your greetings to the angels, saying goodbye to them, because you are leaving the spiritual world, and you are returning to this *dunya*”.

As with the verbal threshold that begins the prayer (“*allahu akbar*”), the *salam* serves as a verbal threshold to complete it. The ritual of *salah* is one of the ways in which space is transformed from ordinary to a place of *baraka*. This space can be anywhere, it simply requires the reorientation of the individual to the *qibla*, aligning themselves with the spiritual lines that emanate from Makkah, and the intention and initiation of prayer.

Returning to the question, if this process of *salah* can be done anywhere, what makes the mosque a site of *baraka*? The repeated action of *salah* within the confines of the mosque, set aside as it is for this worship, is what makes the mosque blessed. Jamia Masjid is not blessed by any inherent nature of its own. It began life as a parish hall. Until it was called a mosque, and the prayer began to take place within it, it was not a site of *baraka*. Rather, the *baraka* was accomplished. This stands in contrast with the Kaaba, which is a mosque that is located on a spiritual centre which exists in Islamic theology on every level of the cosmos, and as such, it is *mubarak* - it emanates blessing by its very nature. The general *baraka* brought about by the sacred rhythm of Islam is manifested in Jamia Masjid through the *salah* of the congregants. The repeated action of worship gives this *baraka* a permanence. I will return to this contention again within this chapter.

Figure 9



The *salah* also reveals more about *baraka*. The most distinctive element of *baraka* is its connectivity, it connects a single space and point in time with many other spaces, places, things, people and moments. It creates a “Heterotopia of Prayer”. The term heterotopia is taken from Foucault, and his ideas on it can be found in *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1971) and in a lecture delivered in 1967 (and reproduced in various places including Dehaen and Cauter’s *Heterotopia and the City* (2008)). In Foucault’s terms, heterotopias are universally found in all cultures and times and serve changing functions in relation the society they are found in. They can be spaces of crisis for the individual (such as a boarding school for adolescents), or else deviation (such as a psychiatric hospital), they are places of juxtaposition, combining what is otherwise separate (such as zoos or botanical gardens), and they are places in which time is experienced differently (the temporary fairground, or the museum which “collects” time). They are places in which, briefly at least, a utopian vision of society can be achieved. The term is used in this thesis not with the intention of laying claim to the body of literature on heterotopic spaces (though certainly the “heterotopia of prayer” may be a valuable addition to identified heterotopias), but rather as a way of illuminating to the reader the changing nature of space and time during the prayer itself. The heterotopia of prayer is a space of otherness - one which brings together (juxtaposes) dualities of time and place. The heterotopia of prayer coalesces times, places, and dualities in a way which cuts across (but are inspired by) Foucault’s six principles of heterotopias (Foucault 1967).

Figure 9 represents the connections that make up this otherness. Through the reorientation towards the *qibla*, there is a connection to the earthly Kaaba, the heavenly Kaabas, as well the presence of the congregation in God’s court, and God’s presence in the mosque. Likewise, the *qibla* and the orientation of the mosque towards it – both externally (in its location) but internally (through the lines on the floor) form what Kahera describes as the “spatial sunnah” (2002) – which connects Jamia Masjid with other Muslims and other mosques (both in the present and historically). There is also a coming together of a primordial past and an eschatological future. As Shaykh Abdul-Aziz stressed at the end of his class, the word *salah* comes from the word *wasl*, meaning connection or to touch in Arabic. The connectivity of the *salah* in a variety of dimensions (geographic, spiritual, cosmic, social, and temporal) is the way in which the ritual invokes meaning in space. The salient point is that *salah* blesses space by creating a connection between the immediate time and place with other times and places which hold symbolic meanings (the Kaaba, the eschatological future, the primordial past). Returning to my original description of *baraka* as a connection to the Divine, I argue the transformative power of the *salah* and its ability to bring *baraka* is a product of the multiple and diverse connections it creates. Having examined here how *baraka* is invoked by congregants, we turn next to look at how *baraka* is encountered and managed.

## **Adab**

In the following section I look at *adab*, what is sometimes described as etiquette. I draw attention to it as I believe it, like *salah*, engages with *baraka*. But unlike *salah*, *adab* is about showing reverence and awareness of *baraka* present in a time or place. I explore this by looking at a mundane activity in a sacred space, that of the mosque. The mundane shouldn't be confused with the secular however. That said, Muslims using with the term secular can sometimes contradict themselves. "Islam doesn't accept secularism, our religion is in everything we do, from worship to work", explains Imam Junayed during a session of Scholarly Discourses, a series of weekly classes held in the mosque on Monday evenings. Within the crowd, a young teenage boy nods along in agreement, wearing a black t-shirt with "DEEN OVER DUNYA" written in bold capital letters in white. Such items of clothing are a niche product, but increasingly popular with young Muslims who wish to represent their religious identity in their apparel. The style merges urban streetwear with various Islamic and Muslim slogans. *Deen* means religion, *dunya* means the world, and thus the meaning of the slogan is presumably "religion comes first". The *dunya* can mean work, wealth, and the various worldly endeavours humans engage in. Yet the slogan only makes sense if one accepts the type of division between secular and sacred, worldly and religious, that Imam Junayed is exhorting against. In practice, if not in principle, there exists a division between what is sacred and what is not, what is religious and what is mundane. The mosque is host to many activities that have no overt religious or spiritual content. At the same time however, these same activities have religious significance. They are conducted within a wider narrative of religion, and are encapsulated by sacred practices that give them meaning. I use the term mundane as an equivalent for the term "*dunya*", meaning "worldly".

As I described in Chapter Six, when referring to the concept of the interspatial mosque and the categorisation of actions in the schema of *fard*, *fard kifayah*, and *mustahab*, these mundane activities are understood within the context of religion, particularly with relevance to the intention behind the action. Sami, the Scout Leader, argues passionately for the importance of mosques hosting activities that though mundane, are nonetheless important: -

"I mean, there are so many mosques out there and they're occupied for just the five prayers? You add up all those times together and you have what? An hour? One hour of use out of twenty-four hours in a day. There is so much more that can be done in mosques and that we need to do."

Jamia Masjid, in Sami's view, comes closest to the ideal of what of a mosque should be. On any given day, Jamia Masjid hosts a large range of mundane activities. On any evening, there will be Scouts groups, exercise classes, *halaqas*, employment workshops, and so on. Through the course of my

fieldwork, the Fire Service, the Welsh Government, the South Wales Police, and the local health board all delivered workshops or consultations in the mosque. By looking closely at one such example of a mundane activity, in this case, the weekly GCSE tuition classes that take place in Jamia Masjid, I trace the ways in which *adab* (or etiquette) is used to bracket and so transform a mundane activity in the sacred space of the mosque. I contend that *adab* serves to underline the meaning of the mosque as a site of *baraka*.

The GCSE tuition on Saturday mornings is managed by Dr Malik, it is one of his “pet projects” to which he dedicates much of his time. When I joined the tuition classes, it was in its third year. I was asked by Dr Malik and Abdi Hanif, the then Mosque Manager, to teach Arabic to both the students and some of the tutors. Below I describe one such class, and demonstrate how congregants and attendees recognised the mosque’s sacredness while attending a mundane activity.

The tuition classes run weekly on Saturday mornings at 10am. I arrive at 9am however, as my allocated time for teaching Arabic is prior to the main classes beginning, so that both teachers and students can attend without missing the tuition that takes place. It is late February and a bright but bitterly cold morning. As I arrive, I notice that both the front two doors of the mosque are open. Mehdi, the caretaker, is cleaning the mosque in preparation for a funeral that will take place later that afternoon. He is currently mopping the foyer. I walk in gingerly, cautious of the slippery floor, greeting him and both Dr Malik and Dr Haqqani who are in the office adjacent to the foyer. There is a strong smell of jasmine from the recent mopping. I take off my shoes and walk into the bottom floor hall in which the tuition will take place.

Maryam, an elderly, retired housewife and her husband, a retired doctor, regularly prepare the bottom floor for the tuition classes. There are eight tables set up, each with four chairs on one side and a single chair on the other side. These tables are placed around the edge of the room with a flipchart placed next to them. There is a coffee table placed in the middle of the hall with a sign-in book open, and a cake-tin with a miscellany of pens and board markers for students and teachers to use.

“Aunty Maryam” is currently praying next to one of the tables. The prayer is the *tahiyatul-masjid*, translated as “greeting the mosque”. It is a short two-cycle prayer that Islamic teachings encourage the Muslim to pray when they enter a mosque. Once Aunty Maryam finishes the prayer, she joins me at the table I teach at. Two students enter,

Amnah and Haniya, they are sisters. They also complete *tahiyatul-masjid* before joining the class. I begin at 9am promptly. I greet my three students, and we begin by revising some of the Arabic phrases we covered last week. As I teach, several more students arrive. They take off their shoes, placing them on the shoe rack, and some pray before joining the class. One student walks to the back of the hall towards the toilets, before returning with water dripping off his face, forearms, and hair. He just performed *wudu* prior to joining the class.

I deliver the Arabic class from a book titled "*arabeena bayna yadayk*" or "Arabic Between Your Hands". It focuses on learning key phrases through repetition and so the class is active and loud. I place the students in pairs and practise phrases with them, correcting them occasionally. At 9.55am, I end the class, and the students disperse to different parts of the hall. Some are tutors, and so take up their seats ready to begin their classes, others are themselves here for tutoring and so sign in and take a seat at one of the tables.

By 10am, the hall has eight different classes running, teaching about thirty students in total. There is tuition available in Maths, English, Chemistry, Biology, and Physics. Most classes are offered at GCSE level, but some are aimed at A-level students. The classes finish at midday. There is a hubbub caused by the different classes, but the students themselves are attentive and involved. Each table has a handful of students, with the teachers splitting their time between sitting and instructing their students directly, and writing notes on the board to explain or summarise a point.

Dr Malik strongly believed that excelling in mainstream education was an integral aspect of being a good Muslim. "Being a good Muslim means being the best at everything you do" he often says, and did so when I interviewed him about his work at the mosque. "The mosque should help Muslims in every aspect of their life" is another motto of Dr Malik's. He puts much of this into practice. Alongside the Arabic tuition, Dr Malik also runs the Health Committee. As a semi-retired GP, he has a medical background, and delivers and organises lectures on topics ranging from mental well-being to diabetes to the mosque congregation. He is supported in his endeavours by the management, particularly Dr Haqqani and Saeed Intishaar, who agree with his vision of the mosque providing innovative services. "The mosque in the Prophet's time was a community centre" Dr Malik said. Yet some members of the mosque disagree about how much of a community centre it should be. In a reminder delivered by a visiting scholar, Shaykh Ansari, during Ramadan 2014, he admonished the congregation: -

“This is not a community centre brothers and sisters. This is God’s House.”

In a similar vein, Saeed once ended a Friday sermon with the following exhortation: -

“This is not Queen Street<sup>12</sup>. This is a masjid!”

There is a tension between the various activities of the mosque. It is a space of prayer, a place of worship and place of reverence for the Divine. The term “God’s House” is used often to describe its special status by congregants. It is a space of *baraka* that made it different and distinct from a community centre, or a commercial high street. This did not necessarily mean however that God’s House should not host mundane activities such as GCSE tuition. Rather, both Shaykh Ansari and Saeed’s exhortations are about *adab*. They both stress the need to maintain certain etiquettes when visiting the mosque. The Muslims who attend the GCSE tuition are maintaining certain spatial practices associated with the mosque but not with other spaces: taking off their shoes when entering, reciting the invocation for visiting a mosque, performing the supererogatory prayer of “greeting” the mosque, and being in a state of ablution. These are all practices which are part of the *adab* of visiting a mosque. In such a way, the mundane activity of attending GCSE tuition is contextualised within the religious space of the mosque. The *adab* provides a way to ensure that the *baraka* and significance of the mosque is not disturbed by the worldly mundane classes.

The first part of this chapter looked at the *salah*, a formal ritual that transformed and imparted meaning into space and time. *Adab* I use to refer to the minor rituals, in the more colloquial sense of the word. These small minor actions framed and punctuated interactions in the mosque, and they served to underline the distinctiveness of the mosque. This *adab* of the mosque was one of the things Mustafa admitted he felt he was struggling to learn, with one incident representing the challenges he faced being socialised into the mosque.

“Don’t do that! There are Qurans there!” An elderly mosque uncle is angrily shouting at Mustafa. Mustafa seems puzzled as to what he is doing wrong. He is sat with his back against the wall, facing the *qibla*, legs stretched out in front of him.

“Sorry?”

“Your feet!”

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<sup>12</sup> The primary commercial high street in the centre of Cardiff.

Understanding the source of the anger a bit better, Mustafa sits upright and folds his legs underneath him. Zakariah approaches Mustafa laughing, and explains jovially that it was because the soles of his feet were pointing towards the bookcase of Qurans.

“I didn’t know,” Mustafa’s responds meekly.

“Don’t worry man, it was just him,” Zakariah reassures Mustafa, once the uncle was out of earshot.

Mustafa was not the only one who sat pointing his feet towards the Quran, it occurred occasionally, but was felt to be scandalous by certain South Asians and Arabs. In certain cultures, showing one’s soles to something is an insult to it, equivalent to the middle-finger in a British context. Amongst the multi-ethnic congregation of Jamia Masjid, it is sometimes a flashpoint of conflict. The incident highlights, however, that *adab* matters. It is contested or expected by mosque congregants.

A more universally accepted etiquette is removing shoes before entering the mosque. The removal of shoes is one *adab* that spatially marks out the mosque. There are “shoes on” and “shoes off” areas, clearly demarcated through doorways and most significantly, through the rich carpet laid on the floor. This carpet is everywhere but corridors, the kitchen, the toilet and the foyer, and so provides a visual cue to congregants about what type of *adab* is expected where. Dr Malik takes responsibility, unassigned and through his own agency, for managing congregant’s shoes when they arrive for *Jummah*. The removal of shoes is the first of many rituals that takes place in the mosque. The reasoning given for removing shoes varies between worshippers. A teenage congregant I spoke to tells me, “we take shoes off to keep the carpet clean”. By contrast, two elderly retired gentlemen in the mosque I speak to as they sit awaiting a prayer give a very different reasoning “*namaaz* needs the person to be *pak*” (*namaaz* is a South Asian/Persian word for the ritual prayer and *pak* is a South Asian word for pure or clean, particularly in a religious context). A third reasoning is given on another occasion, “Musa *alayhi as-salam* took off his shoes in front of Allah, and we’re about to stand in front of Allah”. Though all three reasons are distinct, they are interrelated. They also encapsulate the responses I was given by others.

The reasoning that shoes are removed to keep the carpet clean is a modern Salafi interpretation. The Salafi concern for reflecting the practice of the Prophet Muhammad, and their distaste for “innovations” or *bidah* mean they find the ritual removal of shoes on entering the mosque problematic. The Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah had, in its original design, no concept of a “shoes off” space. The floor was simply the ground. There are also no direct theological instructions for either removing shoes prior to prayer or prior to entering the mosque. For the Salafi “Quran and *Sunnah*” literalist approach to Islam, this absence of evidence is enough to abandon the practice, or



at least to despiritualise it – by that I mean removing from it any specific religious or theological connotations. Salafi mosques maintain shoes off space in mosques but when outside most Salafis do not hesitate to pray with their shoes on. To remove shoes before one enters a mosque, from this Salafi perspective then, is a pragmatic measure to keep the carpet clean and prolong its life.

The elderly gentlemen's reasoning, the second of the three perspectives, is related to the spiritual and physical purity of the prayer. Removing the shoes for some was akin to performing the *wudu*. I questioned the same gentlemen who considered taking their shoes off to be part of being *pak*, "could you pray with shoes on?" The response was a confident and clear "no". The shoes, exposed as they were to indeterminate dirt from the outside world, would nullify the person's *wudu*. To be *pak* meant ensuring one's body is free from any impurity, as well as one's clothes or, in this case, one's shoes.

The third response, which more than a few people referenced when discussing the "shoes off" nature of the mosque, is based on a Quranic verse regarding Moses. In Moses' first encounter with God, as narrated in the Quran, he is told "Verily I am your Lord! So take off your shoes; you are in the sacred valley, Tuwa" (Quran 20:12). Many of the worshippers I spoke to saw parallels between the verse and the mosque. The worshipper, much like Moses, is entering a sacred (*muqaddus*) place, and much like Moses, is about to spiritually enter the presence of God. "It is about *adab*," I was told by a congregant on one occasion, "you would not enter someone's house with your shoes on, so how can you enter God's House in the same way?" Thus, for those who responded in this way, removing shoes is a mark of respect for the sacredness and blessedness of the space being entered. It includes a recognition that part of what makes the mosque unique is that it belongs to God (it was "God's House") and as such, one should observe the proper decorum of a guest (to remove one's shoes before entering a person's home though not universal etiquette, would be unquestioned in many Muslim cultures).

Despite the variety of interpretations as to why, removing shoes is an integral part of the etiquette around the mosque. It creates clear boundaries as to where the blessed space of the mosque begins, and communicates there is something different about the space that is being entered. It is also a physical action, one which (much like the orientation of the body prior to prayer) marks the space as significant. This practice is important enough that it is maintained even when the prayer is taken out beyond the mosque, as is elaborated in the following section. It also highlights an important point about ritual - shared practice is sometimes more important than shared belief. Achieving consensus in practice serves a function; whereas "private" belief about practices can vary. Much like the term *baraka* itself, actions are ambiguous, and carry different meanings for different congregants. The practice, for example of removing shoes is a way of signifying importance, a

metaphor, that is filled with meaning and interpretation as the person wishes. This has a parallel with Eade and Sallnow's description of sacred shrines which "absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses" (1991, 15). *Adab* can be understood as recognition of the *baraka* of a space with no clear definition of what that *baraka* necessarily means. Through the *salah* outlined earlier, and the account of *adab* just provided, the reader should be able to perceive the two distinctive ways Muslims can engage with sacred space. Muslims either bless space (through actions such as *salah*) or recognise blessed space through *adab*.

In the first part of this chapter, we looked at the ritual action of *salah* in the religious space of the mosque. In this part, we considered mundane activities in the mosque, which also served to illustrate how *baraka* is recognised and marked out territorially through *adab* (removing shoes, performing *wudu*, completing prayers upon entering). In the next part of this chapter, we go outside of the mosque and look at a religious action, the *salah*, in a non-religious space, which serves to illustrate by way of contrast the significance of the mosque, ritual and *adab*.

### ***Baraka Beyond***

The *baraka* found in and associated with the mosque is not confined to it. It can be constructed in any space and place, especially anywhere that the *salah* takes place. Jamia Masjid's activities sometimes place congregants outside of the mosque at the time for prayer, in which case, the sacred act of the *salah* is performed wherever was convenient. Social activities are most often responsible for this, such as a community barbecue in a local park or a meal out at a restaurant. When possible, the mosque management book the large City Hall for eid prayers, as the mosque itself cannot accommodate all the worshippers who desire to attend (when City Hall is unavailable, the mosque instead holds the prayer several times over in a single morning to accommodate the numbers). When a prayer does take place outside the mosque, the congregation create the *baraka* associated with prayer through their bodily orientations and their *adab*. However, unlike the mosque, this blessing is much more transitory and so too the *adab*.

An example of this can be seen in an unofficial mosque activity, TNF as it is called by the mosque congregation, or Thursday Night Football. On Thursday night, many of the *shabaab* play football at a local five-a-side pitch. It is essentially the B-team of mosque footballers, the A-team being the Jamia Masjid Regulars, who compete in a local league. I attend one evening in April 2014, the first time I had played football in several years. Mustafa is a regular, having played on Thursday nights with the *shabaab* for several months.

Mustafa is the first to greet me when I arrive on the pitch just before 7pm. It is still light, though cold. The other players, all regulars from the mosque, are present and warming

up. As I stretch on the pitch, I admit to Mustafa that this is the first time I have played in a long time, and joke, “I’ll try not to injure myself”. He reassures me by saying “begin with bismillah, you won’t get injured insha’Allah, and the match will have *baraka*”.

The ten players of the night have been chosen out of a list of fifty. There were intense debates about how to choose the players during the inception of Thursday Night Football, until it was decided by regular attendees that the fairest system was for an appointed *ameer* (leader) to book the pitch, as it had to be done weekly, and to message all the potential players at a particular time on a WhatsApp group set up for the purpose. The first ten to respond would be allocated a space. A place was reserved for the *ameer*, and for a player from the previous week who had volunteered to wash the bibs. Despite the competition for the spaces, there are several individuals who play each week regularly. Occasionally, if demand is high, the five-a-side teams expand to be six, seven and at most, eight a side, to accommodate more players.

The game starts at 7pm, and though the pitch is booked for an hour, the game continues until 8.30pm as no one arrives to claim it. At 8.30pm, with both teams having scored seven goals each, Kamran Ahmed picks up the ball and announces, “we should pray *maghrib* now”. The sun has already set at this point, and the prayer is overdue. A handful of the players walk to the toilet facilities to make ablution, others having arrived at the game already “on *wudu*” are ready to pray. About ten minutes later, all the players have returned. Shaykh Talha is present and was tacitly recognised as the imam for the prayer. Yasin walks onto the pitch and points “*qibla* is this way boys”. He stands facing it, and the others use where he stands as the axis on which to form a row. Yasin gives the *adhan* and the *iqama* in quick succession, one after the other with no pause. The other players join him, forming a line on the pitch. Before doing so, they take off their AstroTurf boots, leaving them a short distance away. Shaykh Talha takes his position several metres ahead of the row, looking back to ensure he is centred. He begins the prayer with “*allahu akbar*”. The first two cycles of *maghrib* prayer include a verbalised recitation, and Shaykh Talha recites loudly enough for his congregation to hear, though not as loud as he would usually recite in the mosque. One of the other pitches has players still on it, but they continue their game without paying attention to the makeshift worship that is taking place on the adjacent pitch. The entire prayer lasts several minutes, after which the *shabaab* dust themselves off, and pack their things to

leave. Some take time to put their boots back on fully, others simply slip them onto their feet and hobble back to their cars with their football boots only half-on.

The ritual prayer can take place in any location, provided it is free from a specified list of impurities (such as blood or faeces). There is no need to sanctify the space, or prepare it in any way. Rather, the sanctification of the space is the prayer itself. One needs only to align oneself toward Makkah, as Yasin did for the group and begin the prayer. The same ritual prayer described in the early part of this chapter took place on a football pitch which, for the duration of the prayer, ceased to be a football pitch but instead became the scene of a cosmic drama in which both Satan's refusal of worship and the Day of Judgement played out for several minutes. A heterotopia was created, with the same temporal and spatial implications, the congregants observed a sacred moment. The pitched was blessed by the activity of the prayer. Unlike the mosque, which houses the prayer at least five times a day, every day of the year, the football pitch only has the occasional worship take place. It receives the blessings of prayer but it is not "God's House". It did not require the same *adab* and reverence at all times but only for the duration of the prayer. The precise area on which the prayer would take place was marked out by individuals removing their shoes and for a temporary period, the same *adab* was maintained in how to inhabit it. The space was marked out, but what prompted it is not a belief that the space is sacred, but that the time is – it was *maghrib*, and thus time to pray. As part of recognising this time of *baraka*, the congregants remove their shoes. This example, of a religious activity in a mundane space, should stress how the space of Jamia Masjid is different. Being a place in which many prayers have taken place, and prayers are scheduled to take place indefinitely, marks it out as having been blessed and thus now a site of blessing. The prayer on the football pitch, by contrast, was solitary. The *baraka* descended during prayer, but is washed away by time.

### **Summary**

In this section I have described the way in which *baraka* is experienced by the congregants of Jamia Masjid, which is a specific Muslim articulation of sacredness. The ritual prayer provides the primary means of transforming and imbuing time and space with sacred meanings. The ritual infuses *baraka* into the physical mosque, leading to the mosque's continued sacredness after the prayer is complete. This sacredness is recognised and reinforced through the etiquette that is practiced within and around the mosque, an *adab* which brackets the mundane activities of the mosque to also provide them with religious significance. The distinctiveness of this process is seen when the prayer is taken out of its mosque context and performed outside, where the *baraka* and the *adab* is temporary. Both *adab* and *salah* underline the temporal aspect of sacredness, as well as the way in which sacred space making is a dialectic process. Time (such as in the case of prayer on the football

pitch) and space (such as the *adab* when entering the mosque for GCSE tuition) are at stake in the experience of *baraka*. The theoretical implications of this are described in Chapter Ten in which I utilise Berger's theory of social reality (1969) and apply it to sacred space. In the following chapter, I turn to look more closely at the contestations that occur over and within sacred space.

## **Chapter Nine – Breaking *Baraka***

### ***Introduction***

In this chapter I intend to give an account of conflict and contestation over the sacredness of the mosque. In Chapter Seven, I looked at the sacred over the course of a day, observing its waxing and waning. In Chapter Eight, I explored sacredness from the centre, by which I mean the moments during which *baraka* is experienced by congregants. I now move from the centre to the periphery, to explore where the limits of sacred space are, and how they are contested. What Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine share is that they are all about the ways in which the sacredness of the mosque is constructed and maintained. My key contention in this chapter is that conflict over sacredness can be another means by which the sacredness of a space or time is underlined. By debating the boundaries of sacredness, they become clearer and the centre becomes strengthened. To demonstrate this theoretical contention, I present my findings through a three-fold division of ways in which sacredness is considered to be disturbed. The first is “Heteropraxia”, the second is the “UnIslamic” and finally the “Inappropriate”. These represent interrelated concepts that exist on a spectrum. Heteropraxia represents the most intense challenge to the sacred, whereas the Inappropriate represents the least. In between is the UnIslamic which is an open and blurred challenge to *baraka*. By fleshing out what disturbs the sacred, I hope to give the reader a greater appreciation of how sacredness is constructed, and what it means.

Heteropraxia, the UnIslamic, and the Inappropriate have various dimensions. The first is spatial practice. There are expectations about what behaviour and etiquette in a mosque should be, and more importantly, what it should not be. Behaviour deemed not to belong within a mosque has a direct implication on the *baraka* in the mosque. The second dimension considers time. There are behaviours deemed inappropriate in the space of the mosque, but only at certain times. Continuing with the temporal theme, the final way in which blessings are challenged is arrhythmia, as used by Lefebvre (2004). I contend that arrhythmia can disturb *baraka*, preventing the establishment of a sacred moment, a sacred moment being when *baraka* in time and space coalesce with the actions of congregants. Any challenge to the *baraka* of the mosque contains the implicit notion that there is something sacred to be disturbed. This brings us back to my contention that contest and conflict in sacred space is thus another way in which sacredness is constructed.

### ***Heteropraxis***

Heteropraxis is a term I am using to describe a range of actions that within Islamic traditions are considered forbidden. I utilise the word in the context of terms such as orthodoxy (from the Greek for “correct belief”). However, here the focus is not on correct belief, which is a particularly post-

reformation Christian concern as argued by Berger (1967) - but correct practice, or orthopraxis. When speaking of incorrect beliefs, one might use the term heterodox (as indeed some theologians do) or alternatively, unorthodox. Heteropraxis is equivalent to heterodox but in the arena of practice rather than belief. I have intentionally avoided terms such as blasphemy or heresy, partly as they arise from an Anglophone Christian background and involve unhelpful connotations, but also as they do not translate easily to Islamic theology. Heteropraxis equally has no direct equivalent in Islamic terms, but it does point in the direction of the jurisprudential terms used in Arabic which I intend to cover in this section. The first is *haram*, meaning expressly forbidden, and the second is *makruh*, meaning disliked. The actions that these terms refer to are of course debated, with nuances of meaning and diversity of application, but the validity of the terms amongst Muslims is not debated. I also use heteropraxis to refer to actions termed *bidah*, heretical innovations, or *shirk*, violations against God's monotheism.

Figure 10

<i>Haram</i> (Forbidden)	<i>Makruh</i> (Disliked)	<i>Mubah</i> (Neutral)	<i>Sunnah/Mustahab</i> (Recommended)	<i>Fard</i> (Obligatory)
<b>Heteropraxis</b>			<b>Orthopraxis</b>	
<i>Shirk/Bidah</i>	UnIslamic/Inappropriate			

On a spectrum, *shirk* is the most serious offence against God followed by *bidah*. Both *shirk* and *bidah* would be classed as *haram*. *Haram* however is more than just *shirk* or *bidah*, and includes other actions prohibited by Islamic teachings. Collectively, heteropraxis can create a rupture in the *baraka* experienced by congregants. The actions which bless or are blessed all fall on the opposite end of the spectrum to heteropraxis (they are the obligatory, *fard*, the recommended, *sunnah*, or the supererogatory, *nafl* – what we might call orthopraxis). Orthopraxis, such as the prayer, generates *baraka* – it creates connections (as discussed in Chapter Eight). Heteropraxis breaks these connections.

### ***Bidah***

In Chapter Seven, I describe the various rhythms which structure the activities of the mosque, mentioning the annual calendar of Islamic events. Celebrations such as *Eid al-Fitr* or *Eid al-Adha* are celebrated ubiquitously amongst Muslims. Some events, however, prompt controversy due to their disputed status. The *mawlid* is one such activity. The *mawlid* is a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth. There are few issues as contentious within the mosque as the *mawlid* and the following conversation reflects this.

Aamir, Nabil and Omar sit in a group on the bottom floor of the mosque. It is the Saturday Night Spiritual Evening. There are thirty other boys in the room, banded together in small groups dotted across the hall. It is 2am in January. The evening started with a *halaqa* by Shaykh Talha, followed by supererogatory prayers. There is now a break for an hour before a movie screening (“Kingdom of Heaven”) which will be followed by a question and answer discussion led by the organisers of the spiritual night. Some are using this break to nap but most sit awake, in conversation over cups of tea, coffee, and biscuits. Aamir prompts a change of topic in the conversation amongst the boys with a question.

Aamir: Is the mosque doing a *mawlid*?

Nabil: No, of course not.

Aamir: Why “of course not”?

Nabil: Because it’s *bidah*.

Aamir: No, no, it’s not man.

Nabil: The Prophet *sallahu alayhi wa salam* didn’t do it, and the companions didn’t do it, it’s just a cultural thing.

Omar: Shaykh covered *mawlid* in *halaqa* ages ago. You should have been there.

Nabil: I don’t need it. I know its *bidah*.

Omar: Shaykh Talha said it’s permissible, according to the majority of scholars, and that it’s not *bidah*, but that you shouldn’t go over the top in celebrations and keep it all *halal*.

Aamir: Exactly

Nabil: But what does that matter if the Companions didn’t do it?

Omar: Shaykh said some did.

Aamir: Even Imam Shafi<sup>13</sup> said it is okay.

Nabil: Well I’m glad the mosque isn’t doing anything for it.

Omar: They are though.

Nabil: They’re not.

Omar picks up his phone from the floor, scrolling through several options and then begins reading.

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<sup>13</sup> Imam Shafi (died 820CE) is one of the founders of the four traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence, and an important scholarly figure within Sunni Islam.



Omar: “Our beloved Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him – the Leader”, next Saturday, and sweets after. See.

Omar shows his phone screen to Nabil briefly.

Nabil: Who is doing it?

Omar: Shaykh Talha and Shaykh Sufyan

Nabil: Who is Shaykh Sufyan?

Omar: From Merthyr Road Mosque.

Nabil: A talk is okay though.

Omar: A talk and sweets.

Nabil: Still, it’s not the same.

This exchange provides a useful example of the views held by the congregation with regard to the *mawlid*, and the way the mosque manages these various views and expectation. *Bidah* refers to a heretical innovation within the practice of Islam. It is common for a Friday sermon to begin with a doxology that includes the following phrase (my own translation): -

“*Kulli biddatun dalala, wa kulli dalalatun fin naar*”

“Every *bidah* is a misguidance, and every misguidance leads to the fire”

The religious standpoint of *bidah* as a severe practice to be censured is largely undisputed amongst Muslims. Whether or not a particular action is *bidah*, however, is a much more divisive question. The *mawlid* is a prime example of an action considered *bidah* by some but religiously acceptable (or even mandated - *fard*) by others. Globally, the *mawlid* is a part of religious and national practice in places such as Malaysia, Indonesia, parts of Pakistan, Egypt, many of the Gulf States, and throughout Africa. Elsewhere, it passes without mention, or in some places, it is actively denounced as an action to avoid. Aamir, Nabil and Omar’s conversation reflects the concerns of many other Muslims, some of whom want a *mawlid*, and others who would be troubled by such a practice. This debate is had in different ways by different people several times over the course of my fieldwork, largely by younger congregants but not exclusively so. The celebration (or not) of the *mawlid* indicates certain religious identities, and as such, debating the *mawlid* becomes a way for congregants to demarcate and communicate their intra-faith religious identity.

Nabil's description of the *mawlid* as a "cultural" practice is pejorative, with religious and cultural often being used as opposites. To describe something as cultural in such a context is to denounce it as not belonging to the religious tradition. Jamia Masjid's management is placed in a challenging situation where they must negotiate the contradictory expectations of their congregation. The event that was scheduled on Saturday and mentioned by Omar carefully managed these expectations, walking a fine line between acknowledging the importance of the date while avoiding anything that may be construed as *bidah*. A brief description of the event is below.

The talk is scheduled to start after *isha* prayers, and so the congregational prayer at 7pm on the Saturday attracts a larger crowd than usual. The prayer hall is half full, about 250 people in total. The crowd also has a distinctly different character to it, owing to the presence of Shaykh Sufyan Ismail, an imam from the nearby Deobandi Mosque. Amongst the already diverse congregation of Jamia Masjid, it is possible to discern a greater presence than usual of Deobandi men with their distinctive white thobes and fist-length beards. After the prayer, led by Shaykh Sufyan as guest imam, the various congregants shuffled forward and found seats closer to the pulpit. Some left, evidently only present for the prayer and not the following talk. Dr Haqqani takes the microphone and states announces the event will start shortly.

A few minutes later, Dr Malik arrives with a young boy, a volunteer, carrying a table to the front of the pulpit. The congregation moves to make space. Shaykh Talha and Shaykh Sufyan have seats placed behind the table for them, and Muadh sets up two microphones on stands, one for each of the speakers. The congregation sit in concentric semi-circles around the table. Shaykh Sufyan begins, uttering the doxology most commonly used to begin a Friday sermon, but which is often used for any sermon, before moving on to the topic of the lecture. He recounts a description of the Prophet Muhammad and concludes with a quote from a Companion of the Prophet, Ka'ab ibn Malik

"There is nothing sweeter to me, or more beloved to me than to glance at the face of the Prophet. And no matter how long the glance, it was never long enough. I never tired of gazing upon his face, yet if you were to ask me to describe him, I couldn't. Even though I stole those glances, his face would fill me with awe and out of sheer reverence, I couldn't stare directly at him, and I would simply lower my own gaze".

“This is our Prophet!” says Shaykh Sufyan. “Beauty, and with such spiritual power, you could sense it.”

Shaykh Talha speaks next. He unfolds a sheet of paper on which there are notes written, and straightens it on the table before beginning.

“Shaykh Sufyan has mentioned the name of our Prophet Muhammad *salallahu alayhi wa salam* quite a lot, but I haven’t heard many of us say *salam* upon him. In a *hadith*, the Prophet said the one who hears my name, the name Muhammad, and doesn’t say *salallahu alayhi wa salam* is a stingy person. He is stingy. Why? Because it is an easy thing to say, and the biggest loser is yourself, because you lose out on all the blessings.

“What are the benefits of sending *salawat* upon the Prophet? They are several. The first, all the *ibada* [worship], of all the actions of worship of obedience we can do, none has the status of *salawat*. Allah told us to pray, but Allah doesn’t pray. Allah told us to give *zakah*, but Allah doesn’t give *zakah*. Allah told us to do Hajj, but Allah does not do Hajj. But Allah told us do give *salawat* upon the Prophet *salallahu alayhi wa salam* and Allah gives *salawat* upon the Prophet.”

Shaykh Talha then recites a verse in Arabic, offering its translation afterwards, reading off his notes.

*“Indeed, Allah and His Angels send blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe! Send blessings on him and greet him with greetings.”* (Quran 33:56)

“When I say Muhammad, all of you should be saying *salallahu alayhi wa salam*,” he insists. The Shaykh’s exhortations had immediate effect, at several points throughout Shaykh Talha’s lecture, whenever he mentions Muhammad or even says “the Prophet”, the audience respond collectively with a “*salallahu alayhi wa salam*” that rises and descends like a wave.

The lecture continues with various stories and recollections on the benefits of *salawat*, before Shaykh Talha briefly addressed the issue of the *mawlid*.

“Many people debate about the *mawlid*, and whether it is *bidah*, or *halal*, or *haram*, or *sunnah*, but we all agree on the Prophet Muhammad *salallahu alayhi wa salam* and *salawat*, and so we need to be unified. If you do *mawlid*, you do *mawlid*, and if you do not, you do not, it doesn’t need any more debate than this”

The talk ends with a *dua* by Shaykh Sufyan, and baklava being given out to the congregation along with a sweet rice pudding prepared by the kitchen staff.

*Mawlid*, which translates from Arabic as “day of birth”, is celebrated in diverse ways across the globe. It is sometimes referred to as “*Eid al-Mawlid*” (“celebration of the birth”) or *Milad-un-Nabi* (The Birthday of the Prophet). The ambiguity of how to commemorate the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday (if at all) allows the mosque to carefully construct an event which marks and acknowledges the *mawlid* without scandalising those who consider it *bidah*. For the pro-*mawlid* camp, a mosque as “God’s House” is expected to hold a *mawlid*. Its observance is especially important in Sufi movements in marking out sacred space and sacred time. The *mawlid* is related to the *julus* seen in Werbner’s “*Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah*” (1996), but the *julus* in question celebrated the birth and death of a saint rather than the Prophet Muhammad. Katz (2007) provides an extended discussion of the role of the *mawlid* in Sunni piety, observing its centrality in many Sufi expressions of Islam.

Those who oppose the *mawlid* consider it to be heretical innovation and a practice that is not encouraged nor condoned in the Quranic text or the teachings of the Prophet, and which comes dangerously close to worship of a human being over God. The debate between these two viewpoints is not just about the *mawlid*’s theological permissibility (although that is part of it), but it is also about whether or not it takes place in the mosque. The sacredness of Jamia Masjid means that the observance or omission of the *mawlid* is inherently tied to the mosque’s status as a place of *baraka*. It can confer legitimacy, and if Jamia Masjid confers legitimacy to an act of *bidah*, the reaction is vitriolic. As one congregant stated poetically and emphatically, “any mosque that does a *mawlid* is not a House of God but a House of *Bidah*!” Yet for the pro-*mawlid* Muslims, the mosque must justify its status as a sacred House of God by marking what they consider the most significant date of the calendar. In this case, it is the *mawlid* that confers legitimacy to the mosque. Jamia Masjid’s management, however, negotiate these two standpoints. It hosts an event that was promoted without reference to the date of the *mawlid* but was conspicuously organised near the 12<sup>th</sup> Rabbi al-Awwal, the day of the Prophet’s birth. This tacit recognition of the date takes the mosque away from

either the criticism of hosting a *mawlid* (the mosque management could respond that it was, after all, simply a talk about the Prophet Muhammad) or the criticism of avoiding it (the mosque could say of course it isn't ignoring the *mawlid* - it's hosting a talk near the date of the Prophet's birth).

The management takes a further step in navigating the sensibilities of a diverse congregation by hosting the event with an imam from another mosque, in this case, a Deobandi trained scholar, Shaykh Sufyan. Together, Shaykh Talha and Shaykh Sufyan represented not a single denominational perspective, but a partnership that would be difficult to accuse of acquiescing to either side of the debate on the *mawlid*. The choice of a Deobandi imam is not accidental. The Deobandis are a reform movement from India and their theological distaste for *bidah* is well known amongst Muslims. Indeed, the celebration of the *mawlid* is often a source of tension between the Deobandis and Barelwis, a popular Sufi movement in Pakistan, who strongly advocate its celebration. The advertising material for the event described it as a lecture followed by sweets. Thus, it was a *mawlid* in all but name, including the contents of a traditional *mawlid* (with the absence of perhaps some devotional songs).

Jamia Masjid's particularly diverse congregation means that unlike other mosques with a more uniform congregation in terms of theology and *madhab*, it must address the issue of the *mawlid*. Jamia Masjid is not just negotiating a contentious event, but its very status as blessed. This only serves to underline Jamia Masjid's ability to confer legitimacy and this legitimacy is linked to the congregants' conceptions of orthopraxis and heteropraxis. The issue of the *mawlid*, while on one level being a negotiation of religious diversity, is also a recognition of the mosque's sacredness. A similar debate would not be had about a community centre, or a public building. While disagreeing about the validity of the *mawlid*, the congregants are agreeing about the sacredness of the mosque.

### ***Shirk***

In the case of the *mawlid*, the mosque management avoided disturbing the sacredness of Jamia Masjid to any great extent. However, the following example reveals an instance where an individual believed that the mosque's *baraka* had been compromised in a very different way – through an act of *shirk*.

The congregation wander into the first-floor prayer hall. There is no rush about their actions. It is *maghrib*, the sunset prayer, during Ramadan 2014. The time is 9.15pm, and the sky outside is unusually bright for twilight. The lights were switched on only a few minutes ago, and as the bulbs are yet to warm up, the half-light from dusk outside provides the bulk of the illumination inside the hall. The congregants have just broken their fasts on water, dates, and various fruits, and are now making their way upstairs to

pray *maghrib* before returning downstairs for the main *iftar* meal. Two rows have already formed in the hall. The worshippers are energetic and animated, refreshed having broken their long fast.

Towards the back of the hall is a group, conspicuous in that they are observing the congregation rather than preparing for prayer like everyone else. They are five women and four men, sitting with their backs to the wall. Some are on chairs, others are seated on the floor cross legged. They watch respectfully as the congregants enter and take their places in the row. The group is from a nearby church, and they are visiting the mosque as part of an interfaith project. As the *iqama* is given, they fall silent and sit attentively, watching the prayer. Shaykh Talha walks to the front and begins the *salah*. There are now three rows of people praying, and more are still arriving via the stairs to join the hall.

One of the visiting Christians, a middle-aged man, kneels half-way between the back of the hall and the congregation. He takes a crucifix which hangs around his neck, grasps it in his hands and begins praying, head bent in reverence, facing the *qibla* like the Muslims. Shaykh Talha recites verses of the Quran which are amplified by the internal speakers, in the moments of silence in between his recitation; the man's worship is audible as a whisper. One of the last latecomers to join the *maghrib* prayer enters the hall. He walks past the Christian man praying, and is startled by his presence and, after a moment of confusion he changes direction and moves to join the row from the other side, placing as much distance as he can between himself and the praying Christian. The prayer concludes after several minutes. Shaykh Talha takes the microphone to offer a brief welcome to the Christian guests who then head downstairs with their host, Bashir, to join the meal.

The latecomer is called Faliq, a mature Malaysian university student. He approaches Shaykh Talha who is sitting in the *mihrab*. "Shaykh, that Christian man was praying!" Shaykh Talha takes a few moments before responding. He is counting *dhikr* on his hands. After coming to completion, he turns his attention fully to Faliq. "Yes, he is a guest with Bashir". "Is it okay for him to pray here though? He's committing *shirk* in the mosque!" Shaykh Talha audibly tuts in disapproval and answers with a tone of exasperation, "yes." He continues "The Prophet Muhammad *salallahu alayhi wa salam*

once hosted Christians in his mosque in Madinah. They slept in the mosque, they worshipped in the mosque. There is nothing wrong with it". Faliq doesn't look reassured, "but he had an idol on him". "It's his *ibada*, we don't interfere," Shaykh Talha responds, Faliq agrees noncommittally and walks away.

*Shirk* is an Islamic term referring to a violation against God's monotheism. It is one of the greatest sins according to Islamic teachings. As with many things, whether Christian worship is *shirk* is contested amongst Muslims, but some view any worship directed at Jesus (a human figure in Islamic theology, and not divine as in Christianity) as a prime example of *shirk*. Faliq was disturbed by the presence of the worshipping Christian, and the action had spatial consequences, evidenced by Faliq's decision to move physically as far away from him as possible. The effect of the Christian worship and the crucifix was the interruption of the Islamic character of the mosque. The worship of the Christian man did not fit into the schema of appropriate spatial practice in the mosque. Faliq's objection was not that the Christian man was praying but that he was praying in the mosque. In other words, there were expectations of where Christian worship belonged, and the mosque was not one of them.

The incident provides a useful example of the wider point that conflict in space can serve to highlight and reveal the meanings that space holds, and indeed, reinforce them. The location of the Christian worship was a greater issue than the worship itself. There are a handful of other examples that are similar to Faliq's – including objections made by one congregant about the presence of copies of the Bible in the library, another congregant raising a complaint with the mosque management about a visiting *khatib* since he had heard the *khatib* was a "grave worshipper<sup>14</sup>" and so on. Such contentions by congregants, objecting to the presence of something (members of other faiths, politicians, certain practices, even other Muslims) form a regular part of the everyday of the mosque. The congregants censure one another and mosque leadership regularly about what can and can't take place in the mosque. These flashpoints of conflict all support the narrative of the mosque as a significant space about which debate is necessary. Belonging is contested to ensure the coherence of the *baraka* is maintained.

### ***The UnIslamic***

The term "UnIslamic" is an important phrase used by the congregants. It does not directly correlate either to the classic legal definitions such as *haram* or the various examples of heteropraxis explored earlier. To call an act of *shirk* or *bidah* "UnIslamic" would come across as an extreme understatement. In the same way that "*baraka*" is used as an open signifier of goodness, UnIslamic is mobilised by the congregation as a blurred and non-descript signifier of that which is bad. The

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<sup>14</sup> An accusation sometimes made against Sufi Muslims who visit and pray at shrines.

reader will already be familiar with the Friday *Jumma* prayer, a key weekly event for the congregation of Jamia Masjid. The following incident took place on one such Friday and presents an example in which the UnIslamic is discussed and reiterates the key theme of this chapter – that of *baraka* being broken, and the sacred being disturbed or interrupted.

The silent and reverential ambience of the mosque is shattered. A car outside is beeping aggressively. It's Friday afternoon in January 2014, and Shaykh Talha is delivering the Friday sermon. Sunlight is streaming through the windows, no one other than Shaykh Talha is speaking. The first floor of the mosque, the larger of the two halls, is full of worshippers sitting cross-legged on the floor facing the imam. The only sound besides the Shaykh speaking and the beeping outside is the occasional shuffling as new people enter the hall and locate a space for themselves to sit.

The beeping outside continues for a minute or two. No one responds or reacts to it. Those closest to the windows facing the street peer outside, but do nothing else. A few individuals exchange glances, before returning their attention to the Shaykh. The beeping starts once again, short and then long, and then short again, communicating the driver's impatience.

After what feels like a long time, but is perhaps merely a minute or two, Ali Javed, a regular, stands up from the front row and walks towards the stairs. He had been sat right at the front, in one of the closest spots to the Shaykh. His journey to the stairs takes him from the front to the back of the hall and down, before disappearing from view of the worshippers. His look is one of determination as he clambers through the crowd of sitting worshippers, many leaning away to give him a clearer path.

The beeping ends a few minutes later and Ali Javed returns to his front row position, climbing across the hundreds of sitting congregants to reclaim his front row position. The Friday prayer continues uninterrupted, and after the sermon is finished, the congregants stand and perform two cycles of prayer with the imam.

After the prayer, there is a short pause of silence as usual. Worshippers have just finished, and the hubbub of hundreds standing and stretching their legs has not yet begun. Ali stands up and takes the microphone. With a grave tone, he urges "brothers, please. We've been sitting here listening to Shaykh Talha's *khutba*, and he said the *hadith* 'none of you truly believe until your neighbour is safe from your harm'. Our



parking is harming the neighbours. Please brothers, park your cars properly". There is little in the way of response from the congregation. Of course, men aren't the only ones driving to the mosque, but the women were forgotten from his exhortation. Some sat and listened, others began making their way out. Ali hands the microphone to Muadh who is waiting to make the announcements.

The cumulative effort invested by the hundreds of congregants into creating and maintaining the sacred moment of the Friday prayer is disturbed as the prayer reaches its zenith due to the cars parked outside the mosque. The beeping and subsequent breaking of standard etiquette caused by Ali leaving the prayer represents a counter-current that interferes with the Friday prayer, its atmosphere and what is *supposed* to happen. Here, the challenge to the sacred comes in the form of an impediment to the conditions necessary for a sacred moment to be observed. It is not *shirk* or a theological issue, but by the much more worldly beeping of an aggravated driver.

Parking is an ongoing point of conflict between the mosque and its immediate neighbours. Speaking to Dr Malik, the parking problem is caused by errant congregants who do not park correctly or legally. "They cause problems by parking opposite the mosque, blocking the road, instead of finding a parking spot further away," he tells me with a smile but with a tone of annoyance in his voice. In 2012, Dr Malik and the former Mosque Manager Abdi Hanif launched a campaign to encourage walking to the mosque. They utilised the *hadith* "every step you take to the masjid is rewarded" (Nawawi 26) as a means to motivate walking instead of driving to the mosque. The posters for this campaign slowly disappeared and were gone by the time I began my fieldwork, replaced by posters for upcoming events or charity campaigns. The campaign faded into obscurity with its two proponents (Abdi Hanif and Dr Malik) no longer promoting it. No one I asked knew who took the posters down and there seemed no intention of replacing them.

Some congregants view the problem differently. Abu Bakr Jamal, a mosque regular who works nearby, expresses that there simply is not enough parking available in the nearby streets and that the council do not consider the mosque's presence in any plans they make about the area; "the council just don't get what a mosque is, they think we maybe visit once a week, even less, I don't think they believe so many people come here daily, I don't think they even realise what *Jummah* is or that there are so many mosques here." The Friday *Jummah* prayer creates pressures on parking availability due to the many mosques in the area. The other local mosques hold *Jummah* in a similar timeframe as Jamia Masjid, which begins Friday prayers at 1.05pm (Hazrat Siddique Mosque and Quba Mosque finish the prayer around 1.20pm in the winter, 2.20pm in the summer; and al-Azhar Mosque holds the prayer at the same time as Jamia Masjid). This confluence of prayer times in the middle of the working day creates an intense demand for short-term parking space, of which there is

very little available in the area. For many Muslims, the parking problem is a failure caused by the local council.

The following continues the events from the Friday prayer described earlier and introduces the issue of responsibility for the parking problem: -

As I leave the mosque after Friday prayer, I notice a handful of cars parked opposite the mosque on the double-yellow lines. The apron of space immediately outside the mosque is full of congregants loitering. Dr Malik stands in his regular space at the doorway with a bucket for collections, repeating announcements. Every now and again he says loudly “please don’t park opposite the mosque brothers”. As I exit, Sami Faisal whispers to me jokingly “I bet the guys who parked there are going to go for a walk before coming back to get their car.” I decide to wait opposite and see who does own the cars. I make my way through the crowd of congregants immediately outside the mosque, and cross the road, passing between the slow-moving traffic. One of the parked cars has a disabled badge displayed clearly on the dashboard. There is a legal dispensation that allows disabled “Blue Badge” holders to park for up to three hours on single or double-yellow lines. A second car is a large four-by-four. I stand near it and wait until the driver returns. It is owned by a young British-born Bengali dressed in a thobe. He walks out of the mosque and waits for his wife, or perhaps sister, with whom he then walks over to the car. He seemed unabashed as he unlocks his car. I greet him with *salam*, and ask him, “is this your car?” in a friendly tone. He smiles and replies, “yes”. “It might have been better to park further away” I reply. “I was running late, *fard* comes first,” he responds as he enters the car. He closes the door and starts the engine, signalling right and idling until a car gives him way.

*Fard* refers to acts considered obligatory on the individual within Islam. The congregational *Jumma* prayer is considered, in most cases, *fard*. The justification presented by the congregant for parking illegally appeals to an Islamic rationale – the Friday prayer is obligatory and thus this minor parking misdemeanour is excusable. The justification recasts his parking as Islamic, and the rules around parking as unIslamic – or at least, not conducive to fulfilling religious duties. I took the opportunity to raise his response to Dr Malik on a later date. Dr Malik is unforgiving, “the good Muslim shouldn’t be late”. When I question one of Jamia Masjid’s occasional *khatibs*, Shaykh Ibrahim, with the same comment, he responds with a more theological musing: “if you have to commit *haram* to fulfil a *fard*, it is no longer a *fard*.” Shaykh Ibrahim argues that the legal and civil obligations of the citizen form an implicit contract between the individual and the State, and in a Friday sermon once stressed

that “Muslims must keep their oaths”. Parking illegally breaks that oath and so makes it theologically impermissible, *haram*, to do so. It would be wrong to give the impression that the mosque management and mosque congregants are at differing ends of this debate however. Many of the mosque congregants themselves are outraged by this behaviour. “Parking like that is UnIslamic” is a comment made by Ghassan Farsi in reference to double-parked cars, he was sharing pictures of particularly badly parked cars via the Jamia Masjid WhatsApp group in Ramadan. “Why even bother coming to the mosque if you’re going to behave like this in public?” he wrote in the group after sending the pictures.

So, what does the Bengali gentleman’s claim that “*fard* comes first” and Ghassan’s critique of “UnIslamic parking” tell us about *baraka*? In the case of the parking challenges faced by the mosque, and the subsequent challenges it presents to the construction of sacred moments, one can discern an example of what Lefebvre describes as arrhythmia (2004). Parking rules and regulations in the area are built around certain presumptions of use and certain routines, such as the working day. The single-yellow lines and residents-only parking spots are used by councils to prevent individuals who commute into work from parking their cars there. Casual visitors to the area in the evening, when there is less demand and visits are presumed to be more recreational or social, are not prevented from parking by the existing rules. “There are plenty of spaces in the day, if they just made it one or two hour no-return, there wouldn’t be any problems” explained Irphan, an exasperated regular who joined a conversation on new yellow-lines that were installed in the area of Jamia Masjid in November 2013. The sacred rhythm of the mosque, which brings congregants into the area five times a day for short visits, clashes with the presumed routines of work and leisure which have been crystallised through parking legislation in the area. Is problem parking “UnIslamic” for, among other things, disturbing the sacredness of the prayer by blocking the street? Or are the rules and regulations which govern the street “UnIslamic” for failing to consider the uses and needs of the local Muslim congregation? The conflict over parking sheds light on these rhythms and routines as they clash, which itself serves to illustrate the temporal and spatial ways in which sacredness is created, contested, and undermined. It is not just the practices inside the mosque, of ritual and heteropraxis, that can construct and disturb sacredness, but the wider environment in which the mosque is located. The ability (or inability) to park, the journey to the mosque, and the opportunity for an extended gathering of the congregants, are all elements necessary for conducting rituals such as the *Jummah* prayer. Any disturbance to these elements in turn disturbs the construction of the sacred. Yet the various responses by congregants serve to stress that the mosque itself must be preserved – and it is not at fault in this sense. To summarise the debate over parking within the mosque: the problem may be the existing parking rules (“*fard* comes first” as one

congregant put it), or else it might be the “UnIslamic parking”, but the problem is certainly not the presence or the location of the mosque itself which, as a significant and important site of worship must be accommodated, either by the council, or by the congregants parking further away. To return to the central contention of this chapter, the parking problem, while being an example of the challenges faced by urban sacred space, also serves to legitimise and stress the importance of the mosque as a sacred space.

### ***The Inappropriate***

The difference between the UnIslamic and the Inappropriate is one of degree. Actions considered “Inappropriate” might run counter to the grain of an Islamic ethos, but would rarely be considered as UnIslamic. They are actions not befitting the intensity of the blessings at a given time, when notions of correct spatial practice change. What is acceptable outside of prayer times, for example, changes when the prayer is due. What can be done in the Scouts Hall may not be appropriate for the prayer hall. Congregants disciplining one another is not uncommon within Jamia Masjid. It might be a conservative Muslim scolding another for wearing a t-shirt with a depiction of a cartoon character on the front (frowned upon in some Islamic traditions), or the incident presented in Chapter Eight in which Mustafa is remonstrated by a mosque uncle for pointing his feet towards the *qibla*. My central contention in this part of the chapter is that these minor infractions and wrestling over appropriate behaviour of space between congregants reveal the meanings attached to it, thus forming a way in which the sacred character of Jamia Masjid is made clear to the congregants. To explore this feature of Muslim sacred space, one can look at how Jamia Masjid’s congregation behave during events which run across a prayer time. These include day courses, such as the *Dawah* Training or Media Awareness Training. However, the most common form of event that often runs across prayer times in the mosque is a wedding. The wedding itself is a notable part of a life rhythm or life cycle, and much like funerals and *aqiqahs*, the wedding is a practice that brings people to the mosque to mark a rite of passage. Weddings themselves are incredibly diverse events in Jamia Masjid. They reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the mosque. The various practices of South Asians, Arabs and Africans congregants of Jamia Masjid are manifested in kaleidoscopically diverse weddings. However, as the mosque is also host to an increasingly British-born generation of worshippers who are often marrying across cultures, the mosque also plays host to entirely unique forms of diversity in weddings as brides and grooms negotiate their various ethnic heritages and British upbringing to create unique cultural fusions.

During my year of fieldwork, the mosque hosted five *mehndi* parties, a pre-wedding celebration in which the bride has henna applied to her hands and feet. The *mehndi* celebration is associated with South Asia, but is practiced in certain parts of Africa and the Middle-East. The bulk of

the weddings that took place in Jamia Masjid were the *aqd* or *nikah*, the formal marriage vows officiated by an imam. These varied from small affairs, such as one that took place in the mosque office, with just the bride and groom, an imam and two witnesses (chosen from the congregation from whoever was present and willing to participate) to larger and grander affairs with food and music. In total, twelve *nikah* ceremonies took place in the year. Jamia Masjid has a formal process of issuing an Islamic marriage certificate, and keeps the practice well documented to ensure it complies with British laws around marriage and immigration. There is a distinction between the Islamic *nikah* and a civil marriage. The former is a religious vow and it is not legally recognised in Britain. Most couples carry out a civil marriage in a registry office afterwards. Across cultures however, hosting a feast or providing food is a standard practice.

One such wedding feast took place in January 2014, and provides a useful insight into how *baraka* is understood and negotiated during an activity that runs across prayer times. Of interest in the following ethnographic section is the way in which appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is negotiated temporally.

The attendees are all in formal wear, suits and ties. As they enter the mosque, Sharif Deen, the brother of the bride, greets them. He shakes their hands, and guides them upstairs. Although the wedding was intended to start at 5pm, people arrive leisurely well past the scheduled start time. It is 6pm now and the proceedings have only just begun. On the first floor, there are 110 people present.

The main hall of the mosque is decorated and transformed for the wedding. The focal point is no longer the *mihrab*, but an ornate stage at one end of the mosque. Most people are sitting on the chairs that are set up across the edges of the hall, some sit on the floor due to a lack of space. Opposite the *mihrab*, is a table with four cakes set up, bottles of drinks and plastic cups.

In the middle of the hall are eight school tables set up and empty, waiting for the food, which is yet to arrive. All the tables are covered in white paper to fit in with the decoration of pink, white and pastel blue which has been placed around the mosque, largely through large ribbons and bows. Shaykh Jibran is introduced. He is giving the *khutba* for the *nikah*. His exhortation is on the various rights and responsibilities of the bride and groom, both of which, he argues, rest on recognising God in one's life. He laments the various "misconceptions" that have crept into married life, "such as the

wife having to clean and cook for the husband, this is not Islamic, not Islamic at all” he says emphatically. Shaykh Talha, who is sat near Shaykh Jibran, jokes loudly, “it’s a good thing the sisters aren’t here, or there would be arguments tonight,” which is met with laughter by the audience and Shaykh Jibran.

Shaykh Jibran concludes his *khutba* by inviting the groom and the bride’s father for the *nikah*. In this instance, the father is assuming the role of *wali*, the agent, for his daughter. Two witnesses have seen her give her approval to her father to conduct the marriage and the witnesses are now also present for the ceremony. The vows are exchanged between the *wali*, speaking on behalf of the bride, and the groom. The ceremony concludes with very little fanfare, and the bride’s father gives a short speech to the attendees. Following this, the MC for the night, Nooh Haleem, announces that everyone should make themselves comfortable until the food arrives.

The food is brought in shortly afterwards. It is Arab cuisine, cooked and provided by Saffron Food and Butchers, caterers who are based opposite the mosque. It consists of slow roasted chicken and lamb on a bed of jasmine rice. The attendees queue up to serve themselves. This practice departs from standard practice in the mosque when food is served, which usually requires everyone to sit on the floor in rows and to be provided with food in pre-packaged cartons. The bride’s brothers indicated they wanted to do something “different” and with more impact than what might usually take place. This innovation has its hiccups, however, as there aren’t any utensils to cut or serve the food. Most improvise with the plastic cutlery present and return to their seats. Soon after the food, cake is served and people once again queue to take a slice. Once everyone has eaten, another brother of the bride, Mohammed Deen, brings in two large speakers which he sets up next to the *mihrab* and connects to a laptop and mixer.

There is discussion during the food as to where the “dancing” would take place. We are told by Sharif that the Scouts Hall had been set aside for this, and that once most had left, the *shabaab* would go there to continue the celebrations. At some point, a decision is made to host the dancing in the main hall. Not all were convinced this is permissible in the mosque, but with the tacit approval of Saeed and Shaykh Talha, who are both present, it carries on. The dancing begins with Sharif taking the groom’s father into the centre of the mosque hall. He is joined then by the third brother, Zafar, who drags along

Khalid, the groom. The music starts and others join. The dancing is based on the Arab *dabke*, and the music itself is traditional Arabic wedding songs. I was told on a previous occasion that there is an entire genre of music devoted to wedding dances, all with a particular rhythm played on Arab drums and with relevant lyrics. The music can be performed live, and those who can perform the music are often in demand for weddings. On this occasion, it is played from a laptop through a mixer. Qassim Khan takes up responsibility to act as DJ. At one point the music stops and instead Muadh plays the drums. After the initial energy of the dance subsides, which lasts twenty or thirty minutes, smaller dances take place. There are now only thirty or forty individuals left in the hall, mostly close friends or family.

Shortly before 8pm, the dancing is stopped as the music is turned off by Qassim Khan. People remain animated and jovial however. Eventually Zafar takes the microphone and delivers the *adhan* for the *isha* prayer. A few guests hang around in the middle of the hall during the *adhan* and seem to want to begin dancing again when the *adhan* is finished, they look towards Muadh and his drums, expecting the music to restart. "After prayer, not now," Muadh answers them, in a much more sombre tone than only several moments ago when he was playing the drums. People move downstairs quickly, some going to make *wudu*. The bottom floor is almost full, with five rows present. Congregants other than the wedding attendees have also arrived for the prayer. Shaykh Talha leads the *salah*.

The prayer is extended, almost leisurely in pace, and about ten minutes in length. When finished, Abdullah Haqqani announces that the Arabic *halaqa* will be in the library today. He repeats it twice, the second time in Arabic. Muadh then instructs, "those attending the party, it will continue upstairs shortly with more cake. All are welcome."

The arrival of the prayer time, indicated by the *adhan*, meant the hall was no longer appropriate for dance. The mosque's dominant purpose, that of the prayer, took over and all other activities had to cease. Here we can observe how prayer times are marked and recognised through changes in spatial practice (and inherently, the expectations of what spatial practice is appropriate). Things which are tolerated outside of prayer times are not during prayer times. Though I used the example of the wedding to highlight this shift, it occurs daily. Conversations cease in the prayer hall after *adhan* is given for prayer, games stop, the mood and atmosphere shifts. Spatially, the carpet, the foyer,

doorways and the *mihrab* serve to illustrate the boundaries of sacred space and mundane space. Temporally, the same boundaries are maintained by congregants through verbal thresholds such as the *adhan* and shifts in *adab*. The congregants censure and discipline each other to ensure that the shift in time is recognised, and that a sacred moment can be constructed. The practices that could threaten this construction, such as dancing, are censured and challenged. The contestation (or disciplining) is an essential part of how sacred time and space are accomplished within Jamia Masjid.

Appropriateness is up for debate however, as seen in a confrontation after a *Jummah* prayer between a congregant and an individual leafletting worshippers outside the mosque.

“Half-price eid sale at Mubarak Foods brother.” A Pakistani gentleman with a groomed beard is handing out leaflets to worshippers as they leave the mosque. He repeats the offer to everyone as they pass, pushing a small A6 double-sided leaflet into their hands. Many try to avoid the flyers, walking around the gentleman. The flood of people as they exit the double doors (both propped open with bricks) into the space outside the mosque quickly creates a bottleneck. The Pakistani man pushes a leaflet towards Dr Gulam “Half-price eid sale at Mubarak Foods brother.” Dr Gulam stops, takes the leaflet, and looking at it carefully, steps closer to the distributor of the leaflets. “*Asalamu alaykum*, brother,” Dr Gulam remarks. The man is disinclined to stop, but Dr Gulam places himself between the man and the passing worshippers. “Masha’Allah, may Allah bless your business.” The man says nothing. “I know it’s important to earn a living, a *halal* living, and masha’Allah your business is helping people buy *halal* and *tayyib* food. But the Prophet *salallahu alayhi wa salam* taught us to keep business and worship separate. Our intentions should be pure when we come to the mosque.” The gentleman from Mubarak Foods steps around Dr Gulam, saying “Thank you, but please,” continues leafleting. Dr Gulam looks bemused, and continues on his way out.

The reader should be now familiar with the diverse activities Jamia Masjid is host to, especially in reference to the idea of the mosque being interspatial introduced in Chapter Six. The incident above shows that there are limits to what activities are seen to belong in the mosque, and the tension that arises when these boundaries are pushed. Not everyone in the mosque agrees with Dr Gulam’s view on separating the mosque and business. At one point, the mosque management trialled a “sponsorship programme” in which businesses advertised their services in the available noticeboard space in return for a monthly fee. The idea was quickly dropped, however, and the reasons discussed in a meeting of the Delivery Team.



Dr Haqqani: "Some people have told us it is *haram* to advertise businesses in the mosque. They are very against it."

Sami: "Is it *haram*?"

Dr Haqqani: "No, I checked."

Zafar: "I can see why it's maybe not a good idea though. It's a bit tacky."

Dr Haqqani: "What does tacky mean?"

Mohammed: "Uh, not very classy. It doesn't really go does it? A mosque being about prayer and worship, and then charging businesses."

Hasan: "They're doing it anyway though, putting posters up or giving leaflets out, they're making money from the mosque. No reason we shouldn't benefit too"

Sami: "Perhaps it's better to let them, or have a policy against it altogether. But having a mosque sponsorship package, it's maybe a bit too Western. Can you imagine it?"

'Today's prayer is brought to you by Coca Cola'. I don't really like it either."

There was an implicit incompatibility between business and prayer according to many of the congregants. It was not conducive to sacred space, but it is a subjective and more loosely defined objection than those considered earlier on in the chapter under the headings of "heteropraxis" and "UnIslamic". What is important to note about inappropriateness is that it is often about negotiating location and time. Promoting a business is not judged to be a bad action, but when and where this is done matter. Within the space of the mosque, or during the time of prayer, what is otherwise deemed suitable becomes inappropriate. This all contributes to my general argument that contest can become a way to establish sacred meanings, reinforcing them from the boundaries and peripheries. Minor infractions considered here under the title of "Inappropriate" reveal the meanings and attitudes attached to certain spaces and times. The examples of inappropriate behaviour and its contestation all serve to reveal the way in which congregants work to convey the meaning imbued in time and space.

### **Summary**

In Chapter Seven, I contend that sacredness is constructed temporally and spatially, at the intersection of rhythms which structure human life. In Chapter Eight, I continued this argument by looking at the ways in which ritual transformed space, and how *adab* worked in conjunction with such transformations, considering the creation of blessed space as a process. In this chapter, I looked at the boundaries of sacredness and the debates around these boundaries. I contend that challenges to the sacred meanings of time and space are ways in which the boundaries themselves

became established. I looked at three categories of spatial practices that in some way posed a challenge to the sacred. The first was heteropraxis, actions which are considered religiously forbidden. Next was the UnIslamic, a looser signifier of things which challenged, undermined, or are an antithesis to *baraka*. Finally, the Inappropriate referred to those actions which are less emphatically disciplined or contested, but nonetheless presented a symbolic contrast to *baraka*. These challenges to the sacred can be manifested in different ways but collectively provide a way to signify the boundaries of sacred space, and, as the boundaries are challenged, contested, or debated, they are strengthened, and more clearly viewed.

Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine show how the *baraka* of the mosque is accomplished, and taken with Chapter Six, present an account of Jamia Masjid that conveys a sense of the mundane and the sacred that form an integral part of the mosque's everyday. In the next chapter, the first of Section Four, I more fully consider the theoretical consequences of the ideas introduced through this ethnography.

## **Section Four – Discussion and Conclusion**

## **Chapter Ten – Discussion**

### ***Introduction***

Having presented in Section Three my ethnography of Jamia Masjid, there remains a significant number of analytic threads that have been introduced, but not pursued at any length. In the following section I develop the theoretical and analytical contributions of my thesis. As an interdisciplinary project, it has interdisciplinary contributions. The subsequent chapter has three overarching themes, and is divided into smaller parts. The first theme is related to the mosque's significance within literature on British Muslim studies, and thus I provide an analysis of the different ways in which Jamia Masjid operates, considering its role as an interspatial mosque, a counter-public, its ecumenism, and its role as a "centre". I also outline the case for Muslim congregational studies, which I believe my work sets the stage for and which is yet to flourish as a field. I then turn to my contribution to the theories of sacred space. I look at how sacred space can be considered a "social reality", a description that transcends the substantive and situational divide identified by Chidester and Linenthal (1995). I argue that theorising has at times misread the role that conflict plays in the construction (not just desecration) of the sacred. Finally, I attend to the issue of the temporal dimension of sacred space, a prominent theme throughout my ethnography. I outline a general case for the consideration of *when* as well as clarifying the specific theoretical tools I utilise in describing the role of time in sacred space at Jamia Masjid. Throughout, I reflect on how my contributions rest upon my chosen method (ethnography), through which I hope to stress the important role ethnography can play in religious studies and British Muslim studies.

### ***The Mosque – The Interspatial Mosque***

The mosque is arguably the most important British Muslim institution, and certainly for the congregants of Jamia Masjid it forms a significant part of their lives - from their daily routines to rites of passage, and even in death. Despite this, there are no contemporary ethnographic accounts of the everyday of a British mosque. This study then offers one of the first conceptualisations of role of the mosque from within the mosque itself. I consciously provide descriptions, some thick and others simply detailed and rich, of prayer, worship and the everyday activities of the mosque. Jamia Masjid's self-professed ambitions are grand, and as described, their diversity of activities reflect these grand ambitions. Congregants offer no fixed definition of the role and function of a mosque, instead viewing it as a "centre", one that could fulfil the needs of its congregants and community in whatever way needed. This dynamic approach is reflected in their range of activities, from the spiritual to the educational, from welfare services to exercise sessions, and there is an "open door" policy for the congregants to use the space of the mosque as they see fit. It is worthwhile to revisit McLoughlin's comments, first introduced in Chapter Two: -

“Indeed, some mosques in the diaspora could be seen as re-inventing an Islamic tradition by slowly taking on a range of community functions that would be more or less unheard of in Pakistan today. So, while primarily being places of prayer and devotion, since the 1980s at least, some mosques in Britain have also functioned as advice centres for the unemployed, Members of Parliament’s surgeries, homework clubs, youth centres, elderly day-care centres, and spaces to prepare food for communal gatherings such as weddings.” (McLoughlin 2005, 1048)

McLoughlin’s comments reflect much of what I found in Jamia Masjid. My ethnographic participants would disagree with McLoughlin that they are “re-inventing the Islamic tradition”. Rather, they see Jamia Masjid as a “revival” of the Prophet’s Mosque as it functioned in his lifetime. The example of the Prophet Muhammad confers a superlative religious sanction (and even a mandate) for the actions of Muslims and, thus, the Prophet’s Mosque occupies a similar role in relation to how other mosques should operate. Jamia Masjid does not see itself as “reinventing”, but rather continuing and reviving a tradition that dates back centuries.

In Chapter Six, I categorised Jamia Masjid’s activities according to a schema that is used within Islamic teachings. These are the *fard*, the *fard kifayah*, and the *sunnah* or *mustahab*. These three tiers describe the way the mosque envisages its role. The *fard* is the mosque’s primary responsibility, the daily prayers. Next are the communal responsibilities, the *fard kifayah*, which Jamia Masjid fulfils, such as the *janazah* and other rites. It is the *sunnah* or *mustahab* – recommended but optional actions – which are interspatial. The *mustahab* can adapt dynamically to suit the changing needs and circumstances of the congregation and the immediate community. The language of “need” also resonates with the literature on the earliest mosques established in Britain, which as outlined in Chapter Two, was largely a result of the needs of migrant families. This schema is significant also for the way it reconceptualises the boundaries between sacred and secular activities. The diverse activities of Jamia Masjid all remained firmly within an Islamic paradigm. What might this tell us about other mosques? There is value, I believe, in applying the conception of the Interspatial Mosque in other contexts. It seems coherent that the conceptions of “*fard*”, “*fard kifayah*” and “*sunnah*” would be in operation for other mosques as they are staples of Islamic orthopraxis. How might a small house mosque, located in a heavily residential area, conceptualise their activities? Is the same “needs” based model of the Interspatial Mosque in operation? If so, is it perhaps time to distinguish it from larger mosques that serve a wider congregation and are, therefore, addressing more varied needs? The Interspatial Mosque can also contribute to

contemporary debates. A survey into provision for women in mosques found that 40% of the mosques that participated in the study did not have space for women (MINAB 2011, 24). A compilation of statistics by Naqshbandi (2015) indicated a figure of 30% of mosques with no provision for women. This debate about women's space in mosques has been stimulated recently by to the establishment of Britain's first "female led" mosque (Sanghani 2015). The discussion between Muslim women activists and usually male mosque committees may prove more fruitful when speaking to each other in the language of "need" (whether spiritual, welfare based or social) rather than the language of equality, rights, or counter-terror (Brown 2008), as has been the case in some quarters thus far.

### ***The Mosque - A Coffee Shop Mosque***

"Coffee shop mosque" was a term used during a sermon by Saeed to illustrate the way he felt the mosque should be used. It should be a place of informal gatherings, discussion and debate, and thus a semi-public sphere for society. It draws on both his experiences of coffee shop culture in the Middle-East as sites of intellectual, political and religious debate, as well an increasingly familiar British experience of coffee shops as places of gathering and social interaction. The "coffee shop mosque" can be viewed as a colloquial way of describing the space of the mosque as a subaltern counter public. Dafydd Jones (2010) also uses the term subaltern counter-public to describe a mosque in West Wales, though the way in which Jamia Masjid operates as a counter-public is strikingly different to Dafydd Jones' study. Jamia Masjid is an outward-facing mosque with a confident public identity. By contrast, Dafydd Jones' example seeks to diminish its spatial presence. Nonetheless, they both fit Fraser's definition of a counter-public, which is rooted in the study of disenfranchisement from the public sphere. Fraser writes "members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics" (1992, 123). The motivating factor for these alternative publics, which Fraser calls "subaltern counter-publics" is exclusion from the hegemonic public. A key point, Fraser contends, is that they are not just places of isolation, but are positioned towards engagement: -

"On the one hand, they [counter-publics] function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides" (1992, 124)

So, while Jamia Masjid's activities sometimes functioned as spaces of withdrawal, some activities created relationships with "wider publics". Politicians used the mosque to address their constituents and garner political support, and campaign groups likewise utilised the mosque as a space for meetings and organising, especially when they were interested in attracting Muslim involvement. With politicians in particular, their presence reverses the narrative of Muslim religious identity as unwelcome or challenged in a sometimes secular, sometimes liberal, and sometimes Christian, public sphere in which belonging may be questioned (see Ismail 2008 for a brief survey of these narratives). Instead the secular, or liberal, or Christian politician is presenting their political message within an overtly Muslim religious space. The Muslim citizen belongs in the mosque and it is the politician who is invited and whose belonging is questionable. To use Fraser's term, this demonstrates an "emancipatory potential" in articulating the concerns of the congregants, and regaining control over the narratives through which Muslims are spoken about.

The role of a subaltern counter-public in providing a discursive space for Muslims to organise helps stress the agency of the congregation. The congregation's role in the mosque has been one I have been keen to foreground. It is an easy fallacy to think that the mosque committee or imams "lead", and the congregants follow. In Jamia Masjid, the congregation are active in organising events and lectures within the mosque, contributing in their own ways to the wide array of activity Jamia Masjid hosts. Some of these activities are done with the oversight or involvement of mosque management, and some are done so informally they receive no overt permission from the management at all. The mosque, as studied from the outside, has often been described as a physical marker of Muslim belonging in the urban landscape. The "coffee shop mosque" model stresses that mosques are also a means to further actualise Muslim agency by providing a discursive space. The mosque as a subaltern counter-public could have easily become the focus of this thesis (and perhaps only didn't due to the author's interest in sacred space). With around 1600-1700 mosques in Britain, the activity of these subaltern counter-publics warrants further attention.

### ***The Mosque - An Ecumenical Mosque***

Two salient characteristics of the British Muslim demographic are that over 50% are under the age of 24, and 45% are born in the United Kingdom (Mustafa 2015, 4). Mustafa argues that religious identity and belonging to an *ummah* have resonance with young Muslims, writing that "the notion of the *ummah* transcends national, ethnic and linguistic boundaries, and this in itself means British Muslims can identify with others across the globe as part of their 'group' based on religious group identity" (2015, 185). The *ummah* as a concept and its implications have been explored by numerous scholars, including Mandaville (2001), Cooke (2005), and Hansen et al. (2009). While Mustafa's work considers the transnational implications of a commitment to the *ummah*, my own findings shed light

on the commitment to the *ummah* through ecumenism on a local scale. Congregants are keen to stress their Muslim identity over any sectarian identity, and Jamia Masjid reflects this desire. Research conducted by Scourfield et al. found that many of the interviewees they spoke to identified more strongly with a Muslim identity than with a sectarian movement or *madhab*, which they often saw as being irrelevant (2013, 83-84). A desire to appear unified was important to the interviewees, but as the findings originate from the same city as Jamia Masjid, I am hesitant to abstract the findings further.

What can be said is that Jamia Masjid's ecumenism and its youthful congregation are strongly intertwined. The young Muslims express that they worship at Jamia Masjid for its openness and welcoming attitude to all. The mosque management are also concerned with providing a broad spectrum of Sunnism to the congregants, believing this to be a more honest and genuine expression of Islam. While religious ecumenism may or may not be a developing facet of British Muslim religious identity, ethnic and cultural heterogeneity is an unavoidable consequence of Muslims in diaspora. British born Muslims marrying and exchanging cultures and practices with other Muslims from different cultural backgrounds puts a greater onus on mosques to cater for ethnically diverse congregations. While the earliest mosques maintained a strong link to an ethnic heritage (which often, by default, entailed a specific denominational orientation), this is becoming increasingly irrelevant to the diverse and sometimes mixed race upbringing of young Muslims. Jamia Masjid, as an ecumenical mosque, presents an insight into how mosques can manage this diversity in the future, and may also indicate the shape of things to come. How significant is Jamia Masjid's ecumenism? While scholars have attempted to trace the religious diversity of Muslims (for a recent example, see Hamid 2016), there may also be a case for considering whether an ecumenical movement within Islam is specific to South Wales, or is something that is found elsewhere amongst Muslims.

### ***The Mosque - The Centre***

The use of the term "centre" to describe Jamia Masjid echoes Werbner's description that "the mosque represents the highest locus of value and communal involvement" and "represents the ideological, regional, denominational, economic and social-cum-residential 'core' or centre of the community" (Werbner 1990, 314). Jamia Masjid operated as a centre in a metaphorical sense – a spiritual and religious core. The mosque maintains a spiritual capital which congregants seek through financially sponsoring the mosque's activities and involving themselves in the running of the mosque. Being a mosque "regular" or a member of the *shabaab* conferred status and respect. The ability to confer religious capital is even more important in relation to the ritual, which becomes more valuable and more intense through its presence in a mosque. Metcalf writes that "for ritual, it



is the practice, not the mosque, that matters" (1996, 6). I would take issue with Metcalf however, since the establishment of over a thousand mosques in Britain indicates that for at least some British Muslims, the mosque does matter in ritual practice.

Jamia Masjid represents a case in which the function of the mosque is shown through its ability to bring rituals to fruition. The nomadic rituals, though valuable, need a home in order to preserve *baraka*. Itinerant rituals cannot maintain blessed space, whereas by repeating them within the mosque, the blessed space takes on permanence and a new life by being able to redistribute these blessings. The function of the mosque in conferring value is perhaps one important facet easily overlooked when considering its various purposes. Congregants locating their leisure activities in the mosque do so in order to put *baraka* in their activities. Likewise, by hosting campaign meetings and employment workshops, worldly and mundane concerns are framed within the religious duties of a Muslim. Politicians are especially aware of the mosque's ability to legitimise. When they address the mosque congregants, they are conscious that simply by appearing within the mosque they are taking advantage of the mosque's spiritual capital, legitimising themselves and their political parties. GCSE tuition and "boxercise" classes, in the same vein, are not only about educational attainment or physical fitness, but now symbolic of a muscular Islam. The role of the mosque in connecting worldly, mundane concerns with the sacred and the blessed is a function of the mosque that can be easily missed. The mosque confers value, confers meaning, and confers *baraka* to everything it is connected with.

### ***The Mosque - The Congregation***

Within Britain, a case for "congregational studies" was made through the work of Guest et al. (2004) who published an edited collection of papers from British scholars working in the field. They are not, nor do they claim to be, the pioneers of the term, writing that "congregational studies have been undertaken in Britain at least as long as in North America", but that "the field is less recognised, less resourced, less institutionally embedded and less prolific" (2004, xi) in the UK. The term is generally understood to focus exclusively on Christian churches, certainly so in the United States, but I believe there is a case for considering congregational studies in a broader sense. This is an argument addressed to scholars interested in congregational studies, to encourage them to consider non-Christian religious groups, but also a case to scholars of British Muslim studies, to be more attentive to the congregation as a subject of inquiry. An increasingly diverse religious population in Britain is reason enough to consider how such people relate to their religious institution and to each other through it, though any such projects would need to also consider what inherent presumptions are entailed within the use of the term congregation and whether the term can be applied to some

religions at all. In the case of Muslims, I feel the term can be applied, having made the case in Chapter Six.

The trends of falling of congregation sizes among churches in Britain have attracted the interest of academics and the concern of Christian faith leaders for several years (Bruce 2002; Brown 2009). By contrast, Muslim congregations are in an apparent period of growth. Records of mosques in Britain are incomplete, but where records exist, there is a suggestion that there are increasingly more mosques, presumably serving a growing congregation. Naqshbandi (2015), for example, records 1654 mosques in Britain in 2015, compared with 1581 in 2014, a growth of 73. This growth in mosques does not necessarily translate into a growth of congregations however. Statistical figures or estimates on Muslim congregation sizes are sparse. A 2015 survey indicated that 60% of British Muslims visit a mosque once a week (ICMUnlimited 2016). However, as the survey focused on Muslims living in areas where at least 20% of the population are Muslim, these are likely inflated figures (since such places are more likely to have mosques within walking distance). If we accept these figures as indicative (with a dose of scepticism) then 60% of Britain's 2.6 million Muslims attending a mosque at least once a week would translate as an overall weekly congregation of 1.6 million Muslims, dwarfing Anglican figures of 765,000 weekly congregants. To add to this, a survey from 2005 indicated 930,000 Muslims attended a mosque at least once a week, though, once again, the data needs to be approached with caution. The research was conducted by a Christian faith-based polling company and released as a "call to action" for Christian groups (Christian Today 2005). I am also unable to access the survey's methodology thus can't assess the reliability of the data. The narrative behind the release of the data gives cause for scepticism. A contrasting survey, conducted through YouGov, indicated 48% of British Muslims never attend a mosque (Wells 2006), which does not tell us much about congregation sizes, but raises the question of how many British Muslims are part of a congregation. The unfortunate conclusion is that we know very little quantitatively about the size of Muslim congregations, and we could also do with knowing more congregations qualitatively. Are Muslim congregations growing? If so, what are the factors behind this growth? If not, are congregations plateauing or in decline? Are some congregations growing at the expense of others? What function are congregations playing in Britain today? A colleague's doctoral project on the *Tablighi Jama'at* in Britain is in a position to answer some of these questions, considering how a global reform movement has bucked the trend of secularisation in Britain (Timol [Forthcoming]).

In summary, the case for Muslim congregational studies emerges from the fact that Jamia Masjid is, without doubt, a "congregationalist mosque". In Christian terms, "congregationalist" is used to discriminate between churches led by their members, as opposed to churches which belong to central bodies (such as the Anglican Church or Catholic Church). In Britain, most mosques are

congregationalist. Congregations are thus the central actors. Invariably, they are responsible for raising the capital for the mosque, choosing the committee, who in turn hire the imam. A further nuance can be added by considering the parish model, operated largely by the Roman Catholic Church, and the “gathered community” model, which Eade identifies as a Protestant phenomenon (2016). Jamia Masjid is certainly a gathered community, its congregants come from across Cardiff and even beyond it to attend. There are however smaller mosques in Cardiff and elsewhere which serve a more geographically bounded community. Muslim congregational studies can provide the opportunity to develop entirely new ways of thinking about the nature of congregations, beyond the parish or the gathered community, which in turn, further Christian congregational studies. If the previous period of British Muslim history is the “mosque-building era” (something identified in Chapter Two), then the current period is the “era of the congregation”. I believe congregations will exercise greater agency over the character and the direction of the mosque in coming years, and mosques will adapt to become institutions that more consciously seek to serve, and at times even compete to attract the attention of, their congregation. It is the congregation who will be dictating the future of British mosques, and it is to them that research attention needs to turn to better understand Islam in Britain.

### ***Sacred Space - The Dialectic Construction of Sacred Space***

A distinction that emerges in my ethnography chapters is between the notion of “blessed” and “blessing”, often expressed through terms such as “*baraka*” or “*mubarak*” by congregants. Space can be blessed and a connection made with the Divine through the actions of congregants. As for blessing, certain places and things give out *baraka*. Jamia Masjid is both blessed and blessing, and these are the primary descriptors of Muslim sacred space. Its blessedness is conceived as a product of the human activity of worship that takes place there. Jamia Masjid is blessed by the worship of the congregants. Yet it confers this *baraka* back to the people and activities it hosts. It blesses. Not all things are believed to be blessed because of the activity of congregants, the Kaaba in Makkah being the prime example. It is a site of cosmic importance quite apart from human activity that takes place there and it is described as “*mubarak*” in the Quran (3:96). Another example can be time periods, such as the night of *laylat al-qadr*, which is an inherently blessed night that blesses those who witness it.

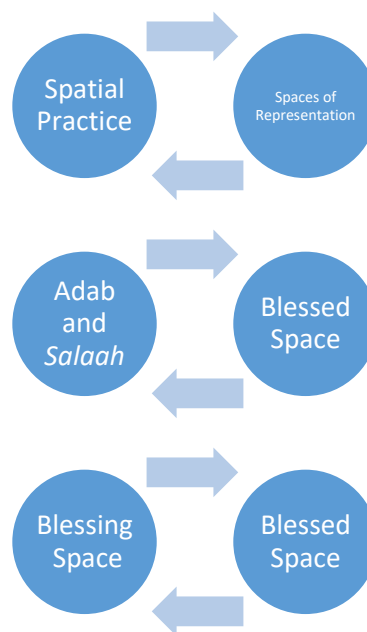
There are some parallels here with Gottschalk’s categorisation of Muslim sacred spaces being either “energized” or “nonenergized”. He argues “we can perhaps describe a place as energized when devotees see it as emitting a self-actualised power, either because of the location itself or some object present there” (2013, 6). By contrast, “nonenergized” spaces simply receive devotions or *baraka*. I go further than Gottschalk, and contend that there is no inert form of *baraka*.

Something which receives *baraka* also distributes it. Jamia Masjid is blessed through the repeated ritual and worship that takes place there. It becomes imbued with this *baraka*, and then becomes an energized site which is itself an agent of *baraka*, a site of blessing. Congregants can access this *baraka* by simply being at the mosque, conducting their weddings or social gatherings there. Durkheim outlines the same idea in his description of ritual energy, arguing that “if the movements by which these sentiments [of ritual worship] are expressed are connected with something that endures, the sentiments themselves become more durable” (1915, 231). These durable sentiments, *baraka* in this case, encountered by the congregants is negotiated by observing a particular *adab* within the mosque. The congregants of Jamia Masjid recognise that the sacred quality of a mosque is, at least in part, brought about by their own actions. It is their prayers, their worship, *dhikr* and *adab* which blesses the space and makes it sacred, continually and repeatedly so, each time marking it out from its surroundings. The actions engulf it in *baraka* that washes over it, leaving a trace, stronger each time, turning it into a site of blessing. Congregants experience and encounter this *baraka* when they visit the mosque, and demarcate it again with their *adab*. This same process seemed true of other mosques in the locality. Jamia Masjid was located in a wider city of mosques, the oldest of which were often spoken about in reverence for their legacy as being sites of such *baraka* for longer, providing a greater intensity of blessing. *Baraka* almost takes on a quantifiable element in such discussions.

This dual nature of sacred sites adds a layer to the situational descriptions of sacred space as outlined by Chidester and Linenthal (1995), and epitomised by Smith (1987) and Knott (2005). In a straightforward situational sense, the mosque is a space marked out for prayer and made sacred through the rituals that take place in and around it. What disturbs this description is that the congregants speak of the diverse ways in which they feel they receive *baraka* from the mosque, in a substantive sense. They perceive the mosque as having about it something viscerally and tangibly sacred that acts upon them. The situational view can, if carelessly applied, erase the worshipper’s view of sacred space. As outlined in the ethnography chapters, *adab* corresponded to a recognition of a blessing inherent (at least at that point in time) in a space. Congregants remove their shoes, enter in a state of ablution, and adjust their behaviour and their clothing in recognition of Jamia Masjid’s sacredness. One could argue that this is what makes the mosque sacred in the first place, and the mosque congregation would not entirely disagree - their worship, after all, is what transformed the bricks and mortar into a site of *baraka*. What is significant, however, is that this *baraka* once again acted back upon them, providing them with nurturing feelings of *home* as well as transformative and numinous moments of religious experience.

What I am arguing is that Berger's thesis on the social reality of religion can be adapted to describe sacred space (Berger's thesis is itself an adaption of an earlier work he conducted with Luckmann titled *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966)). Berger argues that "society is a dialectic phenomenon in that it is a human product, and nothing but a human product, that yet continuously acts back upon its producer" (1969). His contention is that human beings externalise, that is to describe the "continuous outpouring of himself into the world in which he finds himself" (Berger 1969, 5), a process that leads to objectification, "the humanly produced world becomes something 'out there'. It consists of objects, both material and non-material, that are capable of resisting the desires of their producer" (1969, 9). This process is, in Berger's view, communal, "[m]an's world-building activity is always a collective enterprise" (1969, 16). Transferring this to sacred space, I believe space and time take on a religious meaning through ritual and rhythms, and that these religious meaning acts back upon the human producers, who recognise it through *adab*. Congregants bless the space in which they worship. The blessings linger, and are strengthened through each repetition of the sacred rhythms which structure the worship.

Figure 11



To express this dialectic construction of sacredness in terms of Lefebvre's spatial triad (1991), spatial practice is in a relationship with Lefebvrian spaces of representation acting back upon spatial practice. The dialectic construction of sacred space is displayed above (Figure 11). The top two circles indicate the dialectic relationship expressed through Lefebvre's spatial triad. Spatial practice creates spaces of representation, which in turn affect spatial practice. The middle two circles indicate the way in which this dialectic construction is expressed in this thesis. *Salah* and *adab*

created blessed space, blessed space however warranted and invited *salah* and *adab* to take place within and around it. The bottom circles indicate the conclusion of this relationship, blessing space leads to blessed space, congregants receive these blessings and further bless that space, and so on. Representation of spaces, the third dimension of Lefebvre's triad, is omitted only to more clearly represent the relationship between spatial practice and spaces of representation. This dialectic construction of sacred space undoubtedly occurs in relationship to representation of spaces. How Jamia Masjid is mapped by everything from *Google Maps* to *Pokemon Go!*, and how this relates to the dialectic construction of sacred space is an avenue worth exploring, but one which falls outside the purview of this thesis.

Knott (2005, 43) believes with Smith that "sacred space is not the stimulus for ritual; ritual, as sacred making behaviour, brings about 'sacred space'. Ritual takes place, and makes place in this sense". It is a sentence that only partially describes the way in which space can be engaged with. In one sense, it undermines the testimony of my research participants, who at times consider the ritual they perform a direct consequence of the sacred space they inhabit. The congregants who enter Jamia Masjid, remove their shoes, and perform *tahiyatul-masjid*, express they do so because of reverence of spatial *baraka*. But in wider sense, Knott's view is partial because it neutralises sacred space of its agency and power. Spaces can certainly have very real effects upon those who inhabit them; they *can* prompt ritual. Finally, Knott's view doesn't account for the temporal. Time is a stimulus for ritual, and given the tightly embedded nature of space and time, this needs to be considered, especially in the Muslim context where the "time for prayer" is the key factor that prompts the ritual which sacralises space. Ritual, as sacred making behaviour, can equally bring about sacred time. Chidester and Linenthal's (1995) situational and substantive divide is thus transcended by my findings. The mosque holds both a situational and substantive definition of the sacred. In that sense, it also brings together Eliaden and Durkheimian approaches to the sacred. The distinction can also be expressed in terms of whether sacred space is "chosen" or "discovered". Eliade has no qualms about saying that "the place is never 'chosen' by man; it is merely discovered by him" (1958, 369), a position that would put him on the opposite end of the spectrum to the situational scholars such as Durkheim who contend space is chosen, marked and made. Is sacred space energised then, or non-energised? Substantive or situational? Chosen or discovered? The worship at Jamia Masjid rejects these categories as false dichotomies. The theories of Durkheim (and the situational school) and Eliade (and the substantive school) provide two narratives on sacredness. They are not inherently conflicting narratives - sacred space can be all at the same time. I adopt Beckford's (2003, 29) view who argues that a socially constructionist approach "leaves open the possibility that divine or supernatural powers may affect human life directly" while the researcher

focuses on the social implications of religion. This constructionist approach to sacredness is also not absent from classical Islamic thought. Katz quotes the Muslim scholar Ibn Hajar's (died 1449) view that "there is no benefit in attributing superiority to [specific] times except by virtue of the actions that are performed in them" (Katz 2007, 156), a view that while constructionist, is also confessional. As one laconic congregant tells me, "we built the mosque here, but Allah had already made it a mosque before any of us had lifted a brick." Jamia Masjid is an example of a sacred space in which adopting exclusively a situational or substantive approach would be reductive, as such – I draw on both Durkheim and Eliade in giving my account of *baraka*.

### ***Sacred Space - Contesting to Make Sacred***

"Sacred space is contested space" argues Kong (2001, 213). In Chapter Nine I presented to the reader numerous ways in which the sacredness of the mosque was challenged and contested. I argued that rather than being an unavoidable consequence of sacred space, contestation is a way to mark out the space and time as significant. I can contrast my ideas with Chidester and Linenthal, who serve as an example of what can be called the "traditional" view of conflict in sacred spaces. They outline the physical finity - "spatial dynamics of conflict can be explained by the fact that no two objects can occupy the same point in space", which combined with a "surplus of signification" (1995, 18), or an infinity of meanings, leads to conflicts over control and the legitimization of certain significances over others. While there are certainly examples of conflict over sacred places that reflect Chidester and Linenthal's description, it runs the risk of missing instances in which conflict provides meaning. This interpretation is borne out in Jamia Masjid, but it may also have applicability in other contexts.

Through several ethnographic incidents recounted in Chapter Nine, I demonstrated to the reader how congregants sometimes disagree as to the appropriateness or status of actions, but nonetheless agreed about the mosque's status as a place of *baraka*. The conflicts only served to strengthen this agreement. It is worth restating the now classical Manchester School view that conflict "may ultimately contribute to social cohesion" (Van Velsen 1967, 139) and form part of a wider and intelligible social pattern. I take inspiration from Cresswell too, who argues that "expectations about behaviour in place are important components in the construction, maintenance and evolution of ideological values" (1996, 4). Expectations, of course, most clearly emerge when they are broken, and thus reasserting those boundaries is a way to invest meaning into that space. Although Cresswell refers to ideological values in a Marxist sense, I feel it also appropriate to contend that expectations about behaviour in place are important components in the construction and maintenance of sacred space. Contest and conflict in sacred space thus forms another way in which sacredness is constructed. Cresswell writes that "transgression... serves to foreground the

mapping of ideology onto space and place, and thus the margins can tell us something about the 'normality'" (1996, 9). Contest is thus not always an undesirable consequence of space being sacred, but rather, a means of maintaining its very sacredness. An example in the literature where conflict is seen to mark out space as sacred is Luz's case study of the Hassan Bek mosque in Israel (Luz 2008). The study follows how the relatively minor mosque became a symbol of the Palestinian ethnonational struggle following the mosque's role in a series of protests between various groups and factions in the Israel-Palestine conflict (Luz 2008). Jamia Masjid's congregants, while disagreeing about practices or behaviours, agreed about the mosque's blessed status. In terms of sacred space and its study, the coherence of certain conflicts provides an added dimension and productive way to explore the construction of sacred space.

### ***The Temporal Sacred – Sacred Moments***

Central to my description of sacredness in the mosque is that it is not just space which is at stake, but time also. Any consideration of spatiality must also consider temporality. Space is experienced temporally, and time is experienced spatially, the two dimensions of human experience are tied together in our language, metaphors and expressions. My thesis is an exploration of sacred space but one which recognises the temporal dimension of space and, thus, it is also an exploration of sacred time. What follows is an overview of my theorisation of sacred time. I argue these are original empirical and theoretical contributions, and that they constitute an important aspect of understanding sacred space. I can summarise the sacredness of the mosque as being expressed through "sacred moments". These moments punctuate time and space, and are constructed collaboratively through a synchronicity of particular times and particular spatial practices. The term "moments" is taken again from Lefebvre, who speaks of moments that pierce the ordinary routines of life (Butler 2012, 27). Sacred moments are the meeting of time and place with parallels to the cosmic realm. The notion that sacred spaces are mirrors of the spatial arrangement of the heavens or cosmos is well researched (see Kong 2001, 220). "Sacred moments" is a term I use to try and indicate how the same is done temporally. The congregants of Jamia Masjid observed a rhythm of worship which they believed reflected that of the heavens. Below, I continue to build upon ideas of the temporal sacred.

### ***The Temporal Sacred - Spacetime and the Temporal Triad***

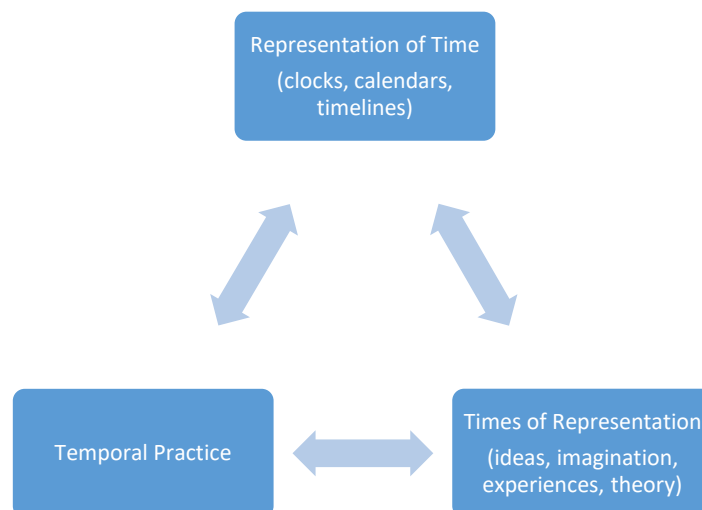
Within certain physical sciences, spacetime has already become a familiar concept, becoming a way to express the interrelatedness of the space and time. The term spacetime, in the study of human society, can be an important remedy to failing to consider how space and time intertwined. Lefebvre and Regulier contend: -



“In each of social practice, scientific knowledge and philosophical speculation, an ancient tradition separates time and space as two entities or two clearly distinct substances. This despite the contemporary theories that show a relation between time and space, or more exactly say how they are relative to one another.” (2004, 89)

The divergence between the spacetime as used within the field of theoretical physics and the spacetime to which I refer is the human and subjective element. Time is quantifiable, but it also holds an unbounded imaginative element that can be attached to it or through it. By contrast, physical spacetime is confined to the mathematical and discrete measurements of the sciences. There is a parallel here immediately to Lefebvre’s spatial triad (1991). My description below of the spatial triad draws largely on Knott’s adaptation of it in *The Location of Religion* (2005), but which I further adapt into a temporal triad. The spatial triad is usually described as consisting of the “representation of space”, which refers to a Cartesian use of numbers and lines to map space. Similarly, we can speak of the “representation of time”, found in clocks, calendars and the mathematical measurement of seconds, minutes and hours. The second of the spatial triad is the imaginative element, in which space is loaded with meaning, referred to as “space of representation”. Of course, there are the “times of representation”, in which powerful, imagined concepts transform time as experienced by the individual or community. And finally, “spatial practice”, the actions which create space. Likewise, there is “temporal practice”, the actions which create, mark and code time. The interchangeability of theory developed to describe space in describing time stresses how closely embedded with each other the two are. Figure 12 below represents the temporal triad.

Figure 12



This is nothing new, and Lefebvre's own work is rich with consideration of time. Lefebvre seems to suggest a temporal triad in his discussion of the interaction between linear times (akin to routines) and rhythms: -

"First, everyday time is measured in two ways, or rather simultaneously measures and is measured. On the one hand, fundamental rhythms and cycles remain steady and on the other, the quantified time of watches and clocks imposes monotonous repetitions.

Cycles invigorate repetition by cutting through it." (2004, 74)

Indeed, Stuart Elden writes in the introduction to *Rhythmanalysis* that it was Lefebvre's goal to "attempt to get us both to think about space and time *differently*, and to think of them *together*" (Elden 2004, ix, italics in original). If Lefebvre was still writing, he may indeed contend that his spatial triad *is* a temporal triad. The summation of my contention is that anything with spatial implications (such as the construction of sacred space) has temporal implications also (and vice versa), and the spacetime implications need be considered to fully understand sacredness.

### ***The Temporal Sacred - Rituals Mark Time***

When describing sacred space, many scholars adopt a Durkheimian definition of the sacred, which is that the sacred are "things set apart" (Durkheim 1915, 47). Rituals, as Jonathan Smith indicates, delineate and demarcate space as important and special (1987). They do this for time also. Through the rituals described in Jamia Masjid, an emphasis is given to the ways in which it is not just sacred space being marked, but also time. The five daily prayers are the best example. The sacredness waxed and waned, creating moments and places rich with significance that were set apart and delineated through verbal thresholds and shifting spatial practice. My research participants are all in agreement - the mosque is sacred space, it is "God's House", full of *baraka*. They would eat, play and talk jovially in the mosque, yet when the time for prayer was marked with the *adhan*, the atmosphere changes, conversations diminish, and they still themselves in preparation. This is the same place, but the time has changed. Verbal thresholds are important in marking sacred times - words, doxologies, prayers and invocations that mark the beginning or end of blessed times. If the congregants are outside of the mosque and the time for prayer arrives, they pray - even in spaces as mundane and unremarkable as a football pitch. Sacred time is what matters here. Throughout my ethnography, I have communicated the shifts in atmosphere, tone, sounds, even smells, that indicated to the congregant (and through the congregant, indicated) that time is changing, from social or educational to sacred, and back again. In the study of ritual, particularly those concerned with the construction of sacred meanings, a greater consciousness of temporal implications can provide a fuller articulation of what is at stake. Clifford Geertz argues that the interpretations of

ethnographers are born out of “exceedingly extended acquaintances with extremely small matters” (1973, 21). It is the extended presence of ethnography that encourages the researcher to contextualise events temporally. The implications of rituals on time are thus an issue I perceived most clearly by virtue of my longitudinal presence at Jamia Masjid.

### ***The Temporal Sacred - When Matters***

Early in the literature review, I identified Geertz as an influence and stated overtly my intention to offer a thick description of the mosque. In Geertz’s own words, “most of what we need to comprehend a particular event, ritual, custom, idea, or whatever, is insinuated as background information before the thing itself is directly examined” (1973, 9), in other words, context is key. To use the now infamous “wink” of Clifford Gertz, the significance of a wink, its interpretation and the response can depend on *when* that wink takes place. The same actions, undertaken at different times, can take on entirely new meanings due to the new temporal context. *Salah* offered in the time before dawn is a supererogatory prayer that reflects the worshipper’s devotion. Any prayer offered before just before dusk however, when *maghrib* begins, is discouraged by Islamic teachings, and thus becomes either a sign of the worshipper’s ignorance of religious rulings, or else that they had been mindless of their *asr* prayer, forcing them to pray it at a time when it is disliked to do so. Reading the Quran in its soft melodic tones is generally considered a sign of piety, but if one does so during the Friday sermon, the other congregants present will censure the individual with tuts and grimaces. My ethnography, by virtue of being temporally extended but physically confined, stresses the importance of how transformative time can be to the meanings of space and the spatial practice.

I contend that sacredness, in the case of Jamia Masjid and perhaps many other locations, is dynamic. It comes and it goes, it waxes and wanes. Is the same true of the shrine, or the urban procession? Certainly, one would think so in the case of domestic rituals such as the *khatme Qur’an*. Studies of sacred space which do not temporally locate their work do not allow the reader to assess whether the snapshot of sacredness presented is static or dynamic, whether it is coming or going, or whether sacred space is the rule or the exception in that place. Returning to Geertz: -

“If anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens, then to divorce it from what happens – from what, in this time or that place, specific people say, what they do, what is done to them, from the whole vast business of the world – is to divorce it from its applications and render it vacant.” (1973, 18)

It is this search to provide a full account that has introduced the contention that “when” matters into my thesis - I have been striving to provide an interpretation of what happens that is married to where, when, and to whom. Likewise, my categories of Heteropraxis, the UnIslamic, and the

Inappropriate all stress the way in which the when and where of actions have importance to the congregants.

Cresswell's "In Place/Out of Place" provides a framework for analysing such considerations, and much like Lefebvre's triad, is easily translated into a temporal theory. The same action, at the same place, but at different times can be celebrated or censured. Cresswell begins his short work by stating "something or someone *belongs* in one place and not in another" (1996, 3) and that there are "*expectations* about behaviour that relate a position in a social structure to actions in space" (1996, 1, italics in original). To rephrase Cresswell's assertions, I argue that "something may be appropriate here, but not now". In the context of Jamia Masjid, expectations of behaviour in time are vital to managing the diverse timescape of the mosque. Newcomers are socialised into learning when it is appropriate for someone to play a game of table tennis, and when one should sit patiently for prayer. They learn, through observation and remonstrations, that behaviour during moments of waxing sacredness is different to behaviour during moments of waning sacredness. There are blurred lines too, liminal times or liminal behaviours over which congregants disagree. Is it appropriate to promote businesses in the mosque? Can wedding joviality continue into prayer times? The disagreements however only served to strengthen consciousness amongst congregants that *when* and *where* mattered through the debate about the boundaries.

As I posited in Chapter Nine, the more delineated and demarcated the boundaries, the stronger the centre. The discord between the temporal needs of the mosque congregants for parking and the parking policies is once again an issue of expectations of behaviour in time. Cardiff Council's parking policy was relaxed in the evening (the expected time of leisure) but strict during the day (the expected time of occupation). The use of the mosque for short visits for the daily prayers, tallied with neither of these two divisions of spacetime. Gale (2008, 30) notes a similar issue when he discusses planning policy in Birmingham which set "limitations on the numbers of people that could attend religious gatherings and the hours during which gatherings could take place, each of which was designed to restrict the impact of 'new' religious establishments upon surrounding residential areas". The consequence of these temporal limitations effectively prevented the mosque in question from being a mosque, forcing upon it a concept of worship rooted in European and Anglican experiences of religion. By overtly considering issues of *when* in my ethnography, I have tried to show that time is an equally debated and significant aspect of sacredness as space.

### ***The Temporal Sacred - Rhythmanalysis***

If time is an important and revealing avenue of analysis, what strategies are there to comprehend and describe it? Having argued that when matters, how does a scholar step back from the immediate moment of time and view the wider pattern? Rhythm can provide one answer. In my

study, I have argued that the activity of Jamia Masjid was rhythmic, and the most significant rhythm for the mosque was the waxing and waning of sacredness, which was tied to the daily rhythm of sunset and sunrise, the lunar month, and the solar year. I identified, in Chapter Seven, a variety of these rhythms that ranged from the daily to the generational. Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) guided my analysis, believing that such an "analysis of rhythms provides a privileged insight into the question of everyday life" (Elden 2004, viii). Lefebvre "proposes nothing less than to found a new science, a new field of knowledge: the analysis of rhythms" (Lefebvre 2004, 3). I risk disappointing Lefebvre by stepping back from his claim of a new field of knowledge, and instead opting to describe my work as a rhythm-conscious analysis (as introduced in Chapter Four).

Lefebvre's "rhythmanalysis" is loosely defined; his short work sought more than anything to place rhythm at the forefront, and in many ways, it was left to subsequent scholars to develop and critique his ideas (Merrifield 2002, 71-92; Merrifield 2006; Butler 2012). My own approach has been to describe the various rhythms that can be perceived within the mosque. The mosque was not, in my view, a uniquely advantageous place by which to view rhythm. One could, as Lefebvre suggests, view a city from a window and observe the comings and goings and begin to identify the rhythms which structure the life of the street (Lefebvre 2004, 27). What I share with Lefebvre is the view that rhythm pervades all aspects of human life, and I have identified and provided an account of the rhythms in Jamia Masjid. I describe my work as a rhythm-conscious analysis because rather than being a study of the rhythms themselves as Lefebvre envisaged, I used rhythms as a conceptual tool to illustrate the dynamic temporal and spatial activities that construct sacredness. Within my description of Jamia Masjid, I have provided an account of the rhythms to stress the wider timescape within which the congregants find themselves and how they interpret this timescape. Jamia Masjid's diverse uses also meant that rhythm was significant in revealing to the reader the sometimes abrupt and sometimes subtle shifts that congregants experience as attendees of Jamia Masjid. More than anything, rhythm allows for a recontextualisation of time and of space into a single theoretical viewpoint. Rhythmanalysis "does not isolate an object, or a subject, or a relation. It seeks to grasp a moving but determinate complexity (determination not entailing determinism)" (Lefebvre 2004, 12). The moving, changing and dynamic use of the mosque is thus captured through rhythm, and thus so too the moving, changing and dynamic nature of sacredness.

### ***The Temporal Sacred – The Sacred Rhythm***

Being conscious of rhythms leads to the most significant rhythm of Jamia Masjid. The sacred rhythm, which is what determines the time of *salah* and holy periods such as the month of Ramadan and night of *laylat al-qadr*. This sacred rhythm is the dominant organising structure of Jamia Masjid; everything else was subordinate to it. The varied activities and uses of the mosque are placed in

relation to this sacred rhythm. Lefebvre and Regulier argue in their rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean cities that: -

“[T]here is a tendency towards the globalising domination of centres (capital cities, dominant cultures and countries, empires), which attacks the multidimensionality of the peripheries – which in turn perpetually threatens unity. In rhythmanalytic terms, let us say that there is a struggle between measured, imposed, external time and a more endogenous time” (2004, 99)

There is likewise a struggle within Jamia Masjid between a form of endogenous time of the sacred rhythm (at least endogenous to the congregants while within the mosque) and the time of the space outside, which functioned according to the working day. Accommodations are made, as I have recounted, to bring the routine of the working day and the sacred rhythm into harmony. So, the Ramadan *tarawih* prayers are shortened to eight *rakat* instead of twenty, allowing congregants to leave earlier and to sleep in preparation for an early start at work the next day. The Friday prayer is kept strictly within an hour, to allow congregants to return to their employment after a lunch break. The sacred rhythm and the working day both demand dominance from the congregant, who negotiates the competing demands.

The significance of the sacred rhythm, however, is more than just organisational. Borrowing from Eliade, who argues that “rhythms are seen as revelations – that is, manifestations – of a fundamental sacred power behind the cosmos” (1958, 388), I contend that the sacred rhythms provide a connection between the Divine and the *dunya* – a connection which is perceived as *baraka*. Paden (1994, 101) theorises that reoccurring ritual helps support the “religious worlds” of believers, writing that “[a]t relentlessly regular intervals – every day, every week, or year – the ‘great thing’ that life is based on, that happened in the mythic past, happens again.” Rhythmic rituals are a way of mapping religious meanings into otherwise everyday occurrences. In fact, this everyday-ness forces a reconsideration of classical definitions of sacredness. The two grandfathers of the study of the sacred, Durkheim and Eliade, agree one can contrast sacred with the everyday and mundane, whereas in my findings there is something everyday about the sacred, and there is something sacred about the mundane.

Religious worship fits into an everyday rhythm, and everyday activities are incorporated into a wider religious paradigm in the mosque, as presented and discussed in terms of the interspatial mosque. The rhythms are, in fact, a key way in which the diverse activities of Jamia Masjid are maintained. Rhythms allow space to be malleable. Quoting from Chidester and Linenthal’s work, if

all places are sacred, “where in the entire universe can I find a place to shit?” (1995, 11). The mosque congregants cited the *hadith* that the “whole world is a masjid” (Sahih Bukhari 335) often. They too would be faced with the same challenge of managing defecation, and other acts that defile or challenge sacred meanings in a world where everything was filled with religious significance. Rhythms are a way in which this sacredness is managed. The whole world is a masjid, and the masjid is sacred, but some times are more sacred than others. In between sacred moments are times when classes, exercise sessions, and political meetings can be held. Rhythm allowed for the congregants to manage sacredness and *baraka*.

### ***The Temporal Sacred - Qualities of Temporal Sacredness***

I utilise a variety of terms to describe the sacred. The first is timescape, a term comparable to landscape. The spatial-temporal relationship is one I am keen to stress. Much like a landscape, a timescape is traversed, it has landmarks through which to make sense of it, and its features are not uniform but heterogeneous and varied. Time cannot be treated as simply hours, days and weeks, but needs to be viewed with the richness by which it is experienced; “[j]ust as Cartesian geometry is a reductive way of understanding space, so too is the measure of time, the clock, a reductive comprehension” (Elden 2004, xi). Within the timescape of congregants of Jamia Masjid, sacredness is capable of waxing and waning. Moving towards a point in time of intense sacredness (a prayer time) and moving away from it after its zenith is an oscillating rhythm that structured the mosque, the people who came and went, what activities took place and the *adab* that produced the space within it.

Turning towards rhythmanalysis, there is Lefebvre’s term arrhythmia (2004). Lefebvre observes that rhythms can interact positively or negatively. I contend that the parking problems of the mosque are largely products of arrhythmia, a discord between the expectations of the council, the short but frequent visits to the mosque by congregants, the area’s student character and commuter rhythms which structured the “rush hour” of traffic. I also add my own terms, being “in rhythm” and “out of rhythm”. To be in rhythm is a central concern of the Muslim congregants of Jamia Masjid, who seek to shape their worship and actions to a divine cosmic pattern. Being “in rhythm” meant that one’s prayers are offered on time, that worship is done during times of sacred intensity, and that the appropriate spatial *adab* is maintained at the correct times. Being “out of rhythm” is to miss prayers, or to contravene sacredness by behaving incorrectly. Being “out of rhythm” could also be a source of desacralisation. This is demonstrated when the integrity of blessed space is challenged not directly but indirectly (through the failure to create the conditions necessary for sacred moments to be constructed). The problems associated with parking are an example of when the pre-conditions for creating *baraka* are challenged or undermined, such as through the

inability to park to attend the mosque, or the commotion caused by blocked cars on the road outside. The terms are important too for combining the spatial and the temporal. One can be “out of place” as Cresswell argues, but also “out of time” as I have argued previously. But the ethnographic approach ties time and place together in such a way that it is necessary to talk of being “out of rhythm” – the dynamic interplay of time and space. Cresswell’s “out of place” and my own “out of time” are only snapshots of a process, captured best by the term rhythm.

Another quality of temporal sacredness is about how time is perceived. As identified in the literature review chapter, Eliade’s theories on sacred space are not always utilised by later scholars, but his vocabulary and descriptive approach are. When an individual or group takes part in a ritual, they access a different, other time, something Eliade calls “The Great Time” or “The Eternal Present” (1958, 392). I utilise both these terms, particularly “the Eternal Present”, to describe the meanings attached to *salah* and other rituals within the mosque. The Eternal Present is a time outside of time, and place outside of place, that the worshipper experiences in prayer, meditation and *dhikr*. The term is useful when combined with the aforementioned temporal triad since “The Great Time” or “The Eternal Present” are imagined and powerful meanings attached to particular times (times of representation). Eliade offers a descriptive strategy for sacred times, stating that “every religion has its lucky and unlucky days, its best moments even on the lucky ones, ‘concentrated’ and ‘diluted’ periods of time, ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ times, and so on” (Eliade 1958, 389). Although I do not use these specific words, I utilise his approach of describing the timescape and observing that time shifts and has qualities that are spatially manifested. Katz (2007), more than any other scholar of Islamic studies, presents a consideration of the timescape of Muslim worship. She locates the *mawlid* in a wider calendar of religious events, highlighting the way in which classical and medieval scholars of Islam perceived time to be hierarchical. The account provided in this thesis aims to reflect the day-to-day encounter with this hierarchical time.

Foucault’s articulation of a heterotopia, developed by Dehaene and Cauter (2008), is a valuable way of understanding how meanings coalesce into space and times. Foucault’s heterotopia is a term that he uses to describe a variety of social spaces that contain one or more dualities. The term thus holds value in describing how the ritual *salah* invokes a variety of meanings to the congregation, which are sometimes dualities (past and present, *dunya* and *akhira* and so on). During the peak of rhythms, when congregants enter into the presence of the moments of the different prayer times, the mosque takes on an imaginative role in which the spiritual realm is mapped onto the mosque. Thus, the front, the direction of the *qibla*, is the direction of God, standing in his court, experiencing the ritual time of the Eternal Present. Jamia Masjid becomes part of a wider network of sacred spaces represented by every other mosque on the globe, connected to the source of *baraka*,



the Kaaba. Similar ideas are found in the work of Barrie (2012, 81) who refers to a mosque or church that mimics the order of the universe or heaven as an architectural “cosmogram”. The idea of sacred space as having a link to the spiritual realm, mapping it or creating parallels, is supported by Kong (2001, 220) who speaks of macro-microcosmic parallels and the cosmographical maps of the spiritual world. Ritual is an integral part of these maps as it “can act out and embody perfectly the way things ‘ought to be’” (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995, 9). The *salah* requires the individual to align themselves towards Makkah, a symbolic act of aligning oneself to face God. In congregations, the worshippers align themselves in rows from the front to the back, each person in contact with the person next to them. During the moment of prayer, the space becomes a heterotopia in the sense that worshippers enter another space altogether, one which echoes primordial and eschatological scenes, while at the same time, the space is host to a Divine presence. The link between the *salah* and the meeting of the Prophet Muhammad with God outlined by Shaykh Abdul-Aziz in his exegesis of the *tashahud* is another heterotopia – *salah* makes a space outside of space, a place with no name with an ineffable quality. It is here and now, there and then, all experienced collectively during worship. Heterotopia, rhythms, eurhythmia, arrhythmia, polyrhythmia, the waxing and waning of sacredness and the Eternal Present provide conceptual terms to describe the significance of time in Jamia Masjid, in ways that recognise emic narratives but are rooted in scholarly terms.

### ***Rhythm and the Study of Religion***

Thus far, I have concerned myself with a description of the significance of my findings to the study of ritual, sacred space and British mosques. I also hope that I have demonstrated the utility of a rhythm-conscious analysis in the study of religion. Religious worship is undoubtedly rhythmic, something observed from Eliade and Durkheim to contemporary scholars such as Paden and Katz. I have demonstrated an empirical example of this rhythmicity through the *salah* and various rites conducted within the mosque, but such examples are not only found within the Islamic tradition. Christian worship also marks time, particularly seen in the Catholic angelus or more common Mass. 2016 saw Good Friday coincide with the Feast of the Annunciation, an occurrence that takes place only a handful of times a century and is considered by Western Christianity as the “true” date of Jesus’ crucifixion. Parker describes the significance below: -

“This day was not only a conjunction of man-made calendars but also a meeting-place of solar, lunar, and natural cycles: both events were understood to have happened in the spring, when life returns to the earth, and at the vernal equinox, once the days begin to grow longer than the nights and light triumphs over the power of darkness.”  
(Parker 2016)

The relationship between cosmic cycles and calendars is thus brought to the fore once again. The notion of a cyclical universe, *samsara*, found in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions also invites rhythmanalysis. The *Kumbh Mela*, for example, which takes place on cyclically on a twelve-year rotation, in four different locations, all connected to the Ganges, which itself is believed to flow from the heavens, is a festival in which rhythm, time and place are conspicuously rhythmic and an application of a Lefebvrian rhythmanalysis may provide a particularly fruitful analytic approach. The advantage of what Lefebvre outlined in rhythmanalysis is its wholeness, its capability to account for time and space, for grand cosmic cycles and everyday routine occurrences. Likewise, its ability to allow the researcher to adopt a specified, detailed, almost microscopic case study, and by following the rhythmic links, arrive at grander ideas that connect to ideas as diverse as the relationship between ancient calendars and modernity, between the cosmic rhythms and rush hour congestion. Perhaps rhythm can allow for a new project in comparative religious studies, which avoids the mistakes of earlier scholars.

### **Summary**

The three themes I introduced at the beginning of this chapter will hopefully have orientated the reader in appreciating the contributions of my thesis. With regard to the study of mosques, I described how the model of the Interspatial Mosque and the “coffee shop mosque” are revealing theorisations of the operation of British mosques. The timeliness of my study is also stressed through the description of Jamia Masjid’s ecumenism, a product, I argue, of its youthfulness. The importance of the mosque in conferring value as a religious centre to activities that take place within it, thus reaccessing the *baraka* of rituals, is stressed. I conclude the first theme by making the case for congregational studies of British Muslims. I turn then to the issue of sacred space, arguing for a processual description of the construction of sacred space which is dialectic and which accounts for the way in which conflict can impart sacred meanings into space rather than undermining them. I finally turn to my concluding theme, that of the temporal sacred. I present a consideration of spacetime, outline the idea of a temporal triad inspired by Lefebvre’s spatial triad, I posit that rituals mark time as much as space, and that contextualising actions in time is important in comprehending them. I try and provide a unifying account of these ideas by articulating the value of rhythm-conscious analysis, before considering the role rhythm might play in the study of religion more widely.

## Chapter Eleven – Conclusion

This thesis opened with the hope that the reader would, through reading the ethnography, come closer to appreciating the everyday life of Jamia Masjid and its congregants. It is an ambitious goal, especially considering that a thesis has another role, namely, to make an original and valuable academic contribution. In Chapter Two, I argue that there is an identifiable absence of studies that look at the *space within mosques* as opposed to *mosques in space* – or alternatively expressed, scholars have looked at the *meaning of mosques* rather than *meanings in mosques*. I also argue that while there are numerous works that are loosely qualitative, there are no ethnographies of a British mosque. I address both these gaps through my thesis. In Section Two, I take the reader through the necessary methodological chapters, first, by outlining the tradition of ethnography to which I lay claim, followed by a chapter giving a prosaic description of the ethnographic process – the *veni, vidi, vici* of the researcher, observing, recording, analysing (Geertz 1973, 19-20). The final chapter of my methodology section presents what I term the “ethnographic journey” – presenting through the metaphor of a journey how I addressed issues of reflexivity, objectivity, bias, and insider-research.

Section Three is my ethnography. In four chapters, I present an account of Jamia Masjid, its congregants, and the activity of creating sacred space. Chapter Six introduces Jamia Masjid and its congregation, its theological roots, and its various activities. I describe Jamia Masjid as an interspatial mosque in the dynamic way it fulfils the needs of its congregants. In Chapter Seven, I introduce the sacred rhythm through a case study of a single day, showing how *baraka* waxes and wanes, and how the space inside the mosque is subject to rhythms and routines. Chapter Eight looks even more closely at *baraka* by considering the ritual of *salah* and the practice of *adab* and how these create and maintain sacred space within the mosque. Chapter Nine moves from the centre to the periphery, examining the various ways *baraka* can be broken, undermined or challenged. The ethnographic sections include both close and rich descriptions of the mosque and congregants but also thick description, providing the reader with an insight into the interpretive social actions that take place within the mosque. My ethnography is one of the key original and valuable contributions of my thesis. It provides an account of the everyday of the mosque, removed from contemporary discussions of terrorism or cultural integration that dominate media headlines and political discussions, and instead hopes to be a contribution that stands the test of time, providing as much value to scholars today as in two or three decades’ time – much like Barton’s (1986) account of a mosque in Bradford.

In order to ensure that my ethnography is presented unencumbered by premature analysis, I only foreshadowed or signalled the theoretical links, leaving them to be developed more fully in Chapter Ten. It is in this chapter that I present my developed theoretical contentions. These centre

on the function of Jamia Masjid as an interspatial mosque, as a subaltern counter-public, and the significance of its ecumenical approach. This ties into a case made for congregational studies of British Muslims, an important avenue of future research. I also present my theories on sacred space. I argue that rhythm, that is time, space and energy, are a way to reunite spatial thinking with temporal thinking. I contend that when sacred space is considered across a timescape, in the case of Jamia Masjid and potentially other sacred sites, a more dynamic understanding of sacred space is achieved. Such an understanding can recognise that sacredness ebbs and flows, that it interacts with other complementary and sometimes contradictory meanings of space, and that worshippers can both engage with sacredness (or in this case, *baraka*) as a subjective experience created through their own rituals, as well as an objective experience. The latter develops Berger's theory of the social reality of religion (1969) into one adapted for sacred space. I present these theoretical ideas largely through the work of the sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre, and his ideas on the spatial triad (which I discuss also as a temporal triad) as well as *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). This temporal consideration of sacred space constitutes an original contribution to the study of religion.

This research intends to provide an account of a mosque for researchers interested in British Islam. It adds to debates on a range of contemporary issues in British Muslim studies. Those interested in the significance of the young British Muslim population would find my thesis relevant in describing a particularly youthful mosque. Researchers interested in the dynamic changes amongst British Muslim denominations would be interested to see the way in which Jamia Masjid adopts an ecumenical approach, with new boundaries of belonging. Religious studies scholars would find an account of a vibrant example of contemporary religion within my ethnography. Academics who are interested in sacred space will find a rich description and theorisation in this thesis which presents an extended consideration of the creation of Muslim sacred space. Theoretical contentions on rhythm, time and the dialectic construction of sacred space will hopefully provide scholars with a new perspective to add to a longstanding tradition of the study of the sacred.

This conclusion also provides an opportunity for reflection on the research process. Conducting an ethnographic project, one which fully embraced the ambiguities of inductive research and fieldwork-led decision making, provided what I felt to be a rich and rewarding research experience. This however came at its own cost. A full year spent conducting fieldwork is not conducive to the three-year schedule most PhD scholarships and funders envisage. The dataset and fieldnotes can be extensive, and simply organising them, let alone beginning analysis, is a daunting challenge. This can, and has in my case, extended the project beyond the three years of funding. Another anxiety is encountered upon realisation that only the thinnest of slices of empirical data can ever be worked up and included in the final thesis. Anyone undertaking a similar project must be

prepared to accept this reality, and be prepared to ruthlessly “kill their darlings”. While remaining convinced of the value of ethnography, there remains questions of how far ethnography is a viable research method for the PhD student (and indeed more experienced academics, who no doubt face similar pressures of their own). This may mean adapting the funding models, or it may mean adapting the ethnographic method. I remain convinced on the value of ethnography, and would not hesitate to encourage other research students, certainly those of religion and British Islam, to consider conducting an ethnography.

There were numerous avenues of analysis that were, in the scope of this thesis, left unexplored, hopefully for use in future publications. The themes that could have been explored included the varieties of religious leadership within Jamia Masjid – *muftis*, *imams*, *shaykhs*, and more. Likewise, the *Jummah* was only considered for its role in the creation of sacred space and time. The fifty hours of transcripts of Friday sermons, delivered by nearly two dozen different preachers, formed too large a body of data to include in this work. The notion of “muscular Islam”, the “coffee shop mosque”, the mosque as a site of civic action, and the relationship of Jamia Masjid to other mosques could all have been explored at greater length. This thesis chose, however, to explore the role of the congregation in making the mosque, in marking out the sacred time and space, and the contribution of the congregants in shaping Jamia Masjid. The themes of the congregation, of the sacred, and the everyday, are the axis around which all my chapters orbit.

For those interested in researching British mosques, I hope this thesis provides orientating information on some of the challenges of access as well as strategies for resolution. British mosques are an important institution, and I believe as I indicated in Chapter Ten, that we are entering an “era of the congregation”, in which Britain’s 1700 or so mosques will be increasingly congregational-led and the congregation will become a more important feature of the mosque than ever before. I would encourage those considering research projects on mosques to reflect on whether they have accounted for the congregation in their research design. Having provided an in-depth case study of a contemporary mosque, I hope more will follow. Is Jamia Masjid singular in its purpose as an “interspatial mosque”? Do other mosques operate as “coffee shop” mosques? How familiar would Jamia Masjid’s construction of sacred space and time be to Muslims who worship in other mosques, in Britain or abroad? I indicated that Anglophone Islam has yet to develop a vocabulary to describe the differences between small “house mosques” and larger mosques. Further research in this direction would be valuable, academically as well as to policy makers.

The best conclusions often bring the reader back to the beginning, so this chapter ends with the quote which opened this thesis. Speaking to a congregant of Jamia Masjid, I asked the innocuous question of “what does the mosque mean?” His response was obviously passionate and still stands

out in my fieldnotes for the emotion behind the words. “This mosque means everything to me. It’s like home, and heaven, and everything mixed in together. I belong here, even if I don’t belong anywhere else. It’s like a piece of paradise, cut and pasted here in Cardiff.”

## Glossary

<i>adab</i>	Arabic and Indo-Pak word for "etiquette", "good manners".
<i>Adhan</i>	"Call to prayer".
Ahle Hadith	Reform movement from South Asia, stress the importance of the text, particularly the Prophetic hadith.
<i>Akhira</i>	"Hereafter", the life after death.
<i>alayhi as salam</i>	"Upon him be peace", invocation and honourific said after the names of Prophets in the Islamic tradition
<i>al-baqarah</i>	"The Cow". The second chapter of the Quran.
<i>alhamdulillah</i>	"Praise to God", an expression taken from the Quran which expresses gratitude to God, but can be used in multiple contexts.
<i>Alim</i>	Arabic and Indo-Pak term. "Scholar" (male, singular).
<i>Alima</i>	Arabic and Indo-Pak term. "Scholar" (female, singular).
<i>al-isra wal miraaj</i>	"The Night Journey and the Ascension". An incident in the life of the Prophet Muhammad recorded in traditional biographies in which he travelled from Makkah to Jerusalem, and then to the heavens.
<i>allahu akbar</i>	"God is the Greatest". Used to begin the formal prayer.
<i>amanah</i>	"Trust" or "safety".
<i>ameen</i>	Said after a prayer, equivalent to "Amen".
<i>ameer</i>	"Leader".
<i>Aqd</i>	"Contract", usually the wedding contract.
<i>aqiqah</i>	A celebration, usually in the form of a feast, to celebrate a child's birth. Considered to be "sunnah", a practice recommended by the Prophet Muhammad.
<i>asalamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakhatu</i>	Greeting used by Muslims. "May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you".
<i>asalamu alaykum</i>	Most common shortened greeting used by Muslims, "May peace be with you".
<i>asalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah</i>	Shortened greeting used by Muslims, "May the peace and mercy of God be upon you".

<i>ashura</i>	10th of Muharram, the first Islamic month. Commemorated by Shi'a Muslims as the day when Hussain ibn Ali was murdered, and by Sunni Muslims as the day when Moses was saved from the Pharaoh.
<i>Asr</i>	The third of the five daily prayers, at late afternoon.
<i>baraka</i>	"Blessings".
Barelwi	South Asian, largely Pakistani, reform movement. Sufi tendencies.
<i>Beta</i>	Urdu word for "son", Bangladeshi word for "man", often used colloquially as a term of endearment.
<i>Bidah</i>	Literally "innovation", indicates a religious heresy.
<i>bismillah</i>	"In the name of Allah", prayer uttered by Muslims at the beginning of actions.
<i>Dabke</i>	Form of dancing popular amongst Arabs of the "Levant"
<i>Dalin</i>	The final word of <i>surah al-fatihah</i> , meaning "astray".
<i>dar ul-uloom</i>	"House of Learning", Arabic term, used by Muslims from various backgrounds to refer to religious seminaries. Amongst South Asians, it is largely used to refer to Deobandi institutions of learning.
<i>dawah</i>	Arabic for "invitation", implies religious preaching, particularly to encourage people to convert to Islam.
<i>Deen</i>	Arabic and Indo-Pak word for "religion".
Deobandi	South Asian reform movement, stress preservation of scholarship. One of the largest reform movements in Britain, strong links amongst Pakistanis.
<i>Dhikr</i>	Remembrance of God, regular chanting of specific phrases.
<i>Dhul-Hijjah</i>	Twelfth and final month of the Islamic calendar, during which the Hajj pilgrimage takes place.
<i>Dhur</i>	The second of the five daily prayers, shortly after noon.
<i>dua</i>	"Prayer", particularly invocation.
<i>Dunya</i>	Arabic and Indo-Pak term for the "world", particularly in terms of materialistic world.
Eid	"Celebration", in most cases refers to the two primary festivals of the Islamic calendar. "Eid al-Adha" celebrated after the Hajj, and "Eid al-Fitr", celebrated after the month of Ramadan.
<i>Eid al-Adha</i>	The Festival of the Sacrifice. A Muslim celebration that takes place following the Hajj, commemorating the Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice for



	God.
<i>Eid al-Fitr</i>	The Festival of the Breaking of the Fast. A Muslim celebration that takes place following Ramadan.
<i>Eid al-Mawlid</i>	"Celebration of the birth" of the Prophet's Birthday.
<i>Eid Gadah</i>	Indo-Pak (largely Hindi/Urdu) word for the largest mosque in a city in which Eid prayers take place.
<i>Fajr</i>	The first of the five daily prayers, at pre-dawn.
<i>Fard</i>	"Obligatory", a religiously mandated action for every individual.
<i>fard kifayah</i>	"Communal obligation", a religious mandated action that the community must fulfil rather than the individual.
<i>Fatwa</i>	A formal religious opinion.
<i>Fultuli</i>	A Bangladeshi Sufi Islamic movement represented in Britain largely through first generation Bangladeshi migrants.
<i>Habasha</i>	Archaic Arabic for the horn of Africa.
<i>Hadith</i>	A historical oral tradition or written text that describes something the Prophet Muhammad did or said.
Hajj	The major pilgrimage Muslims must complete once in a lifetime, if financially capable, to Makkah.
<i>Halal</i>	"Permissible"
<i>halaqa</i>	A religious class, literally, "circle".
<i>Hanafi</i>	One of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence.
<i>Hanif</i>	A follower of the Prophet Ibrahim, or inclining towards one's natural disposition of good.
<i>Haram</i>	"Impermissible".
<i>hasanat</i>	"Rewards", literally, "goods".
<i>hidaayah</i>	"Guidance".
<i>Hijra</i>	"Migration", refers to the migration of Muslims from Makkah to Abyssinia and subsequently, Madinah, during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad.
<i>Ibada</i>	"Worship", single, collective noun.
<i>ibadaat</i>	"Worship", plural.

<i>Iblis</i>	The name for Satan in Islamic teachings.
<i>Iftar</i>	The meal at which the fast is broken.
<i>Ilm</i>	"Knowledge".
<i>Imaan</i>	"Belief".
Imam	Leader of the Islamic ritual prayer, title given to a religious scholar.
<i>insha'allah</i>	"God-willing".
<i>iqama</i>	The call to prayer made directly before the prayer begins.
<i>Isha</i>	The last of the five daily prayers, taking place when the sky becomes dark.
<i>Jamaa</i>	Congregation.
<i>Jamate Islami</i>	South Asian reform movement that stresses political and religious engagement.
<i>janazah</i>	Funeral prayer.
<i>jazakallahu khair</i>	"May God reward you with good", invocation equivalent to saying "thank you".
Jibraeel	"Gabriel", the Archangel in Islamic teachings.
<i>Jinn</i>	Beings created from "smokeless fire" according to the Quran (55:15). They can behave as demonic spirits, or be benign and pious Muslims. Though they occupy the same earthly realm as humans, they are invisible and more akin to spirits.
<i>Julus</i>	A procession, particularly carried out by Sufi movements.
<i>Jummah</i>	The Friday prayer
Kaaba	Identified in Islamic theology as the first mosque on earth, located in Makkah.
<i>khanaqah</i>	A building specifically used for Sufi gatherings or to host members of a Sufi <i>tariqa</i> .
<i>khatib</i>	The person delivering a sermon (see " <i>khutba</i> ").
<i>khatme Qu'ran</i>	An Urdu term describing the ritual completion of the Quran in a single session, achieved by individuals communally reciting separate parts of the Quran.
<i>khutba</i>	"Sermon", usually the sermon part of the Friday prayer.
<i>laylat al-qadr</i>	Literally 'the Night of Power'. Referring to a night an auspicious night in Ramadan.

<i>madhab</i>	Arabic for "School of thought", referring to jurisprudential methodologies. Urdu, "religion".
<i>madhahib</i>	Arabic, plural of "school of thought".
<i>madrasa</i>	An Islamic school or teaching centre.
<i>maghrib</i>	The fourth of the five daily prayers, immediately after sunset.
<i>makruh</i>	"Disliked" or "prohibited" according to Islamic teachings (see " <i>halal</i> " and " <i>haram</i> ").
<i>malaika</i>	"Angels", plural.
<i>masha'Allah</i>	"God willed it".
<i>masjid</i>	Arabic for mosque. Literally meaning "a place of prostration".
Masjid al-Haram	Literally "The Sacred Mosque". Refers to the central mosque of Makkah situated around the Kaaba.
<i>maulvi</i>	Indo-Pak word for "religious scholar".
<i>mawlid</i>	Celebration of the Prophet's Birthday.
<i>mehndi</i>	Traditional South Asian pre-wedding celebration, applying henna to the hands and feet of the bride.
<i>mihrab</i>	The prayer niche or decorated aspect of a mosque at which the Imam prays and communicates the direction of prayer to Muslims.
<i>Milad</i>	Abbreviated term for "milad-un-nabi" or alternatively a celebration of the birth of a saint.
<i>Milad-un-Nabi</i>	Another term for "mawlid", celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, literally means "birth of the Prophet".
<i>mimbar</i>	The pulpit on which the imam stands to deliver sermons within a mosque.
<i>mu'addhin</i>	The caller of the <i>adhan</i> .
<i>mubarak</i>	Arabic, "blessed".
<i>Mufti</i>	A religious scholar qualified to offer formal religious opinions (see " <i>fatwa</i> ").
<i>Muharram</i>	The first month of the Islamic calendar.
<i>Mullah</i>	Indo-Pak word for "religious scholar".
<i>muqaddus</i>	"Holy".

<i>mustahab</i>	"Optional" or "permitted". See " <i>halal</i> " and " <i>haram</i> ".
<i>Nafil</i>	"Supererogatory ", similar to " <i>mustahab</i> ".
<i>namaaz</i>	Indo-Pak word for "prayer", particularly the five daily prayers in Islam. Persian roots.
<i>Nikah</i>	"Marriage" the act of conducting the marriage contract.
<i>Pak</i>	Indo-Pak word for "pure" and "clean".
<i>Qari</i>	Arabic, "reciter", a person particularly qualified in the recitation of the Quran.
<i>qibla</i>	The direction of prayer. In any location, it is the direction towards Kaaba.
<i>Qur'ankhwani</i>	Indo-Pak celebration, reciting the Quran and sharing food. Largely domestic.
<i>Quran</i>	The Muslim sacred text.
<i>Quraysh</i>	An early Islamic tribe to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged. The Quraysh were the most prominent opponents of the Prophet Muhammad.
<i>rabbana walakal hamd</i>	"O Lord, to you is all praise". Recited during the " <i>salah</i> ".
<i>Rabbi al-Awwal</i>	Third month of the Islamic calendar. Month in which the Prophet Muhammad was born.
<i>rahma</i>	Mercy and compassion.
<i>Rajab</i>	The seventh month of the Islamic calendar.
<i>Rakah</i>	One prayer cycle of the " <i>salah</i> ".
<i>Ramadan</i>	Ninth month of the Islamic calendar, during which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset.
<i>sahaba</i>	"Companion", particularly a follower of the Prophet Muhammad from his lifetime.
<i>Sahih al-Bukhari</i>	One of the six books of <i>hadith</i> considered to be most reliable and historically authentic.
<i>Salam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Literally meaning 'Peace'. It is also the shortened form of the longer Islamic greeting "<i>as salamu alaykum</i>" meaning "May peace be upon you".</li> <li>ii) An alternative term for "salawat" – prayers made for the Prophet Muhammad.</li> </ul>
<i>Salafi</i>	Middle-Eastern reform movement that stress the abandonment of tradition

	and return to original sources of Islam through personal study.
<i>salah</i>	Ritual prayer. There are five daily <i>salah</i> . See " <i>fajr</i> ", " <i>dhur</i> ", " <i>asr</i> ", " <i>maghrib</i> ", and " <i>isha</i> ".
<i>salallahu alayhi wa salam</i>	"Peace and blessings be upon him", Arabic invocation said after the name of the Prophet Muhammad.
<i>Salatul Khusuf</i>	"Prayer of the eclipse", a specific prayer completed only during an eclipse.
<i>salawat</i>	An invocation made upon the Prophet Muhammad.
<i>salwar kamees</i>	Indo-Pak, literally, "shirt and trousers", a long-shirt and loose trouser combination.
<i>samawat</i>	"Heavens", plural.
<i>samiallah huliman hameeda</i>	"God hears the one who praises Him", doxology said during the <i>salah</i> .
<i>Shaban</i>	The eighth month of the Islamic calendar.
Shafi	One of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence.
Shahr Haram	Literally "The Sacred Months". Four months of Islamic calendar.
<i>Shaykh</i>	A title for a religious scholar, largely, but not exclusively, used by Arab speakers.
Shia	One of the three major denominations of Islam (alongside Sunni and Ibadi).
<i>Shirk</i>	Arabic term for a violation against God's monotheism.
<i>Shuyookh</i>	Arabic, plural of " <i>shaykh</i> ", meaning "scholars".
<i>Sidratul Muntahar</i>	Arabic, "lote tree", refers to a symbolic tree marking the furthest extent of creation.
<i>sujood</i>	Arabic, "prostration".
<i>sunnah</i>	Literally meaning 'tradition', 'example' or 'habit'. Refers to speech, actions and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad.
Sunni	One of the three major denominations of Islam (alongside Shi'a and Ibadi).
<i>surah al-Fatihah</i>	Chapter of the Opening, the name of the first of the Quran.
<i>Tablighi Jama'at</i>	South Asian reform movement that stresses personal religious reform.
<i>tafsir</i>	Exegesis of the Quran.

<i>Tafsir ibn al-Kathir</i>	The Quranic commentary of Ibn al-Kathir (died 1373).
<i>tahajjud</i>	An optional prayer offered before <i>fajr</i> .
<i>tajweed</i>	The science of the accurate recitation of the Quran.
<i>tarawih</i>	An optional prayer offered after <i>isha</i> during Ramadan only.
<i>tariqa</i>	A Sufi brotherhood.
<i>tashahud</i>	The "declaration" of God's oneness made during the sitting in <i>salah</i> .
<i>tayyib</i>	Arabic, "pure", "wholesome"
<i>ulama</i>	Arabic, plural of "alim", literally "scholars", refers to religious leadership.
<i>ummah</i>	Arabic, the global Muslim community
<i>Umrah</i>	The minor pilgrimage in the Islamic tradition
<i>Ustada</i>	Arabic and Indo-Pak term for teacher, female
<i>Wali</i>	An "agent", particularly in weddings, responsible for representing a party during the marriage.
<i>Wasl</i>	Literally, "connection"
<i>Wudu</i>	"Ablution", the ritual washing completed prior to prayer.
<i>Yathrib</i>	Archaic term for the city of Madinah, Saudi Arabia
<i>Yawm ad-Deen</i>	Literally "The Day of Judgement". A part of Islamic eschatology.
<i>Yawm al-Alast</i>	Literally 'The Day of 'Am I Not?'. Referring in Islamic theology to the congregation of primordial souls who were asked by God 'Am I not your Lord?'.  
<i>Zakah</i>	One of the five pillars of Islam, referring to giving 2.5% of one's wealth over a certain amount to charity.
<i>zikr</i>	Alternative spelling of <i>dhikr</i> .

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